OVER KHYBER TO THE CASPIAN SEA

BY

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BOMBAY
THACKER & CO., LTD.
1944

FIRST PUBLISHED 1944

Set and printed in India by J J. Khambatta at Jam-e-Jamshed Printing Press, Mangalore Street, Ballard Estate, & Published by C Murphy, for Thacker & Co., Ltd., Rampart Row, Bombay.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Do not expect to derive any political knowledge from what you are about to read I know nothing of politics and care less I am quite unqualified to give you a book dealing with "*Inside Anywhere*" Do not expect either to improve by much your knowledge of countries, their historical and cul tural backgrounds, their geographical peculiarities or the difficulties of their economic system When I am journeying in a country it is sufficient for me to establish that I am in the country I intended to go to After that my interest lies in the people I meet, their reactions to meeting me, the immediate effect of my surroundings on me and whatever companions I have and perhaps, above all, my interest lies in the day to day difficulties attendant on making a journey in countries where communications are bad and hotels worse

This, then, is something in the nature of a record of a journey from India, done in wartime by my husband and myself The countries we visited were Afghanistan and Persia The route we took you may be able to determine from the narrative which follows

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PROLOGUE

Tor and I made up our minds to go sight-seeing together in Delhi. We intended to be very thorough so we bought a guide book and studied it Next we buttonholed an old guide at the Cecil Hotel, without difficulty persuaded him to come with us and booked a taxi for the trip The guide gave us his card on which was written

THE ONLY GUIDE IN DELHI
S N BILLE \

We laughed and said that was a pretty big claim to make He answered : " They call me Uncle Bille and I am sixty-two years old Now you put away the guide book for I will tell you much better of all the things that are written in it."

We drove through the dusty streets of Delhi, passing innumerable bullock and camel carts, which many times blocked our path. We could see that the old guide was very excited and anxious to start on his job He wanted to show us what he could do because we had laughed over his card We passed through the old Delhi Gate and took the road to the Fort.

Here Uncle Bille embarked immediately on a summary of the main events in the history of the Fort. He gave a very good imitation of an actor playing his part on the stage At the end of his lecture he said " Now do you believe I am a good guide ? "

" We will proceed," he said in a peremptory tone and we walked into the Fort as if we were proceeding to a coronation

When we came to some cut marble windows he exclaimed " Look through here Do you know who used to

sit here staring through those windows?" I peeped through and said "I am sure it was the poor women in the Fort who were not allowed to participate in any glamourous life," but guide Bille said "Shah Jahan often came here to see his women" Then he added "Of course the fact that he promised his wife on her death bed that he would never marry again did not prevent him from having something like 100 women in his harem" "I suppose he had to have some one to admire him in his kingly state," I said "Yes," he went on "Here the women sat looking at the King on the Peacock Throne" I said "What Throne?" for it flashed through my mind that it had been given this name because the king had been pompous and proud "I will show you," Uncle Bille said and we walked along to the Durbar Hall

The hall looked magnificent The old guide said with a gleam in his eye "Have a look round and guess what is old and what has been restored in this hall" I looked round and saw that the frescoes on the walls and pillars were fresh and brightly coloured while the wooden ceiling looked old and moth-eaten so I guessed quickly that the ceiling was old He laughed and said "That is the only thing in the Hall which is new The Mahrattas looted the ceiling in 1760 and melted it down"

It was amazing how fresh the frescoes looked, and in olden days with gems inlaid, pillars, walls and ceiling covered in gold and silver, the hall must surely have been one of the world's wonders.

Then the guide went on "Here was placed the Peacock Throne" He marked off a square in the middle of the hall. "It was built by Shah Jahan and was the pride of the Moghal Empire," and then, as guides do, he added "It took seven years to complete,' he extended his arms to full length as if to touch the bygone days with his fingers, "at a cost of six and a half million pounds sterling There were eighty lakhs of rupees in precious stones alone, one single stone was worth one lakh of rupees"

"The name of the Throne," he went on "came from the fact that two peacocks, inlaid with gold and precious stones, were placed at the back of the throne"

The old guide was thrilled as he told us some more of the history of Shah Jahan, whom he thought to be a great man, while he almost burst into tears when he came to tell us of his cruel son who had thrown him into prison and kept him there

"In 1739 Nadir Shah invaded India, looted Delhi and carried off the Peacock Throne on seven elephants" By now there was quite a crowd round us listening to the guide's story He was at the very peak of his dramatic performance One of the onlookers said "Surely the Throne could have been carried away on one elephant It was not so big as all that"

"It was six feet long and four feet wide" the guide flung at him furiously, "but do you think Nadir Shah, who came all the way from Persia, would only take the throne when he saw walls inlaid with jewels and big cushions embroidered with gems and pearls? He made a big platform which covered seven elephants and on these he placed the throne and all the rest of his loot"

Uncle Bille was furious at having been interrupted in his histrionics He had lost his temper by this time and had to contemplate on his favourite Shah Jahan to regain his equanimity So now he said "Here sat Shah Jahan in all his glory," and we could picture him sitting there in the world's most beautiful room—certainly the most valuable room We could see him enjoying the lovely view over the Jumna River which in his day flowed just beneath the walls of the Fort No wonder there is an inscription on the wall

"If paradise be on earth, it is here,
it is here, it is here"

Fascinated by guide Bille's story I said to Tor "If any one is going to see that throne, it is me, it is me, it is me" Tor laughed and said "Where is it now?" The guide answered "It was taken over the Khyber Pass to Kabul and eventually it ended up in Teheran" Tor said with some astonishment "I have been to Teheran and I never knew it was there"

CHAPTER I

OVER THE KHYBER

We arrived at Peshawar by train, drove through the broad streets of the town and went to Dean's Hotel

After having paid off our coolies, I sat down on the edge of the bed and forgot time and the unopened luggage which lay around me in wild disorder My thoughts went back to the very warm day in Delhi when we had seen the deserted site of the Peacock Throne Here I was now on the same road as the Throne—on the way over the Khyber Pass

I was jerked back to the present again when my husband came into the room and saw me still sitting on the bed surrounded by unopened luggage "It is late," he said, "You must hurry up and dress for dinner We must get up early to-morrow for we have several things to do and by lunch time we will be off over the Khyber Pass"

"Where the Throne went," I said and went into my bathroom I think he thought I was a bit mad

Three o'clock in the afternoon the following day saw us bundled up in a motor car, ready to start on our journey Our first stopping place was not far from the hotel however It was in fact the Peshawar Post Office It was in a way, fortunate that we had to stop there for while we were impatiently waiting we suddenly remembered that we had forgotten to change our money into Afghan currency My husband went off into the Post Office again to do the changing While he was inside a car drove up alongside ours Inside the car sat a big, handsome north-country Indian with eyes as big as prunes which have been lying in water overnight He asked me why we had come back again and I explained that we had not even started because of the

money problem He seemed intensely interested in the matter and when my husband came back and handed to me a big fat envelope, bursting with money, his eyes became twice as big

We were travelling in a legation car, with diplomatic passes, and we therefore crossed the border into the Khyber without much difficulty Jamrud fort looked like a battleship and was a grand opening to the Khyber Pass It was like driving on holy ground, going up the Khyber Pass I found everything I had been led to expect Those brown coloured mountains created an atmosphere of historic romance and fantastic adventure The little watch tower on the hills conjured up scenes of olden times, colourful scenes, full of glory and honour; I could see the plumed horses of the cavalry I felt a terrific thrill going over the border, so much so that I got out of the car and walked across to be able to have the feeling that I had really made a physical effort

As we crossed the border we found that Afghan time is two hours behind Indian time I found too that I got an impression of entering France, for the uniform of the Afghan soldier is rather like that of his French counterpart and the flat cap is almost identical

We had, of course, to have our passes examined The soldier who stopped us was evidently unqualified to let us pass, for he went to fetch another soldier who again had to fetch a third one The latter seemed determined to fill himself with water from a well where he was drinking, before he came to attend to us Having finished drinking, he disappeared into a house and I felt certain we would never see him again

Meanwhile I chatted to our driver He was concerned over the rain which was falling at the wrong time of year I pointed with some dismay to the bad state of the road in front of us "I said it didn't look very promising He laughed and said with pride "I am an Indian," then, with scorn in his voice, "this is Afghanistan What do you expect?"

At last, the soldier emerged from the house, accompanied by another man Together, and with some aid from our

driver, they had another long scrutiny of our passes Our driver at this point learned that we were not Ministers of State, as he had previously thought, and after that treated us with scant respect We were however, allowed to pass and on we went into Afghanistan

The road was terrible But for the fact that it was marked out by stones you could not have told where the road was supposed to be It was like driving in the middle of a desert The sky in front of us threatened heavy rain It changed from dark blue into a most beautiful violet hue and was intermittently streaked with fierce zigzags of lightning It looked magnificent against the golden coloured mountains

We passed a lonely tree by the road and as there were many small rags on it, it became conspicuous From the motor driver, I learnt that there was a shrine near by Superstitious people had each put a rag on the tree after visiting the holy grave

I asked the driver why people visited the shrine He gave an interesting account of the many shrines nearby There were many similar shrines round about in the hills he said People went there to secure relief from sickness Some for instance visited Shrine "A" for cures for boils or Shrine 'B" for rashes and skin diseases What surprised me most was that there were "specialists" among the shrines as among medical practitioners It was natural in a country where no proper treatment was available to resort to such means of getting a cure I was told that there were shrines for curing lame horses and suffering cattle too I could not help feeling sorry when the driver told me about the shrine frequented by childless couples The story was pathetic The couple visit the shrine, hang a small 'charpai'* nearby with a stone on it and pray to the dead saint to use his good offices so that the woman can have a child soon

All the way along the road was crossed by little streams of water, through which the driver shepherded the car with great care He was beginning to impress on us the im

* "Charpai"—is a simple and portable local cot (lit charpai—four legs.)

portance of having a good driver Suddenly he stopped and I saw in front of us something more than a stream ; it was quite a river this time I thought at first he had stopped just to make himself more important, but when I asked him whether we could cross or not, he shook his head and thoroughly enjoyed his position of being the custodian of our precious lives

The bridge had gone and I realised that it had gone many years before I felt sure our Indian driver told every newcomer that it was difficult to pass because the bridge had just gone I tried to appear very impressed with the difficulties of the situation but said "Surely nothing can stop an experienced driver like you"

Meanwhile my husband had found a shallow spot higher up the river where we could cross We drove up to this place, followed by a lorry which had just arrived behind us Our own driver, joined by the one from the lorry, tested the bed of the river to make sure it would not shift or give way when a weight was put into it We crossed safely in the end, but had not gone far when another badly swollen river barred our progress

It was growing late in the evening by now, and we did not relish the idea of perhaps having to spend the night in the car, stuck by the road side, especially in a vicinity which was well-known for organised dacoity There was nothing else to do, however, but to wait until the flood water had subsided a little The sun had already gone down and had left a lovely orange glow over the mountains The effect was to make the thunderous sky look still more threatening The new moon looked so tiny and shy compared to the boldness and power of the other heavenly gods

The driver and his companion, an old man with red hair who always put such an air of importance round everything he did, went on to the roof of the car, while we made ourselves as comfortable as possible inside Outside the car, a guard walked up and down, but I was never quite certain whether the idea was that he should protect us or that he would rob us while we were sleeping Consequently every time he passed my head, I awoke and watched him

These guards who keep watch on the roads all the way through the Khyber and the mountains to Jallalabad are usually local people paid by the government I wondered if this very spot was the place where the cycle incident happened A man made up his mind to cycle from Peshawar to Kabul He got safely over the Khyber Pass and was cycling happily along towards Jallalabad when he saw a guard behaving very strangely The guard, on the other hand, had never seen a cycle before He apparently thought it was the devil himself who was after him and they both fought for their lives

But eventually I must have fallen sound asleep, for I do not remember anything more until I was wakened by our driver opening the door of the car to tell us that the water had gone down and that he thought we would go on our way

Of course this did not prevent him becoming important again by walking into the middle of the river to test the bed once more and his sense of importance was gratified and we solicitously asked him if he did not feel very, very cold sitting with wet trousers It was still dark and it was difficult by this time to find the road in places where it had been washed away by the rain To make matters worse huge boulders had been carried on to the road by the flood water and we were lucky not to have the axle of the car broken But it was tedious and now and again I fell off to sleep I was frightened that the driver would do the same for he must have been very tired by this time

CHAPTER II

JALLALABAD

At last we arrived at civilisation and I awoke in time to find we were driving through the gates of a house The road led us through a garden and we stopped in front of a big bungalow This was the British Consul's bungalow in Jallalabad, where we had been expected to arrive in time

for dinner the previous evening We had of course, arrived somewhat late for dinner—it was in fact, early morning, but still dark and I lay down flat on the cold stone of the verandah floor It was pleasant to lie down anywhere after being bunched up for so long in the car, so lovely that I think it went to my head, for I suddenly found everything going round and round in the most disconcerting manner, and it was some time before I reacted to my husband's delight at having been shown two rooms with beds

After a while servants arrived and we relished the proferred food which we ate on the lawn by the light of hurricane lamps I was famished, as with the exception of a little fruit, I had eaten nothing all day. When we had finished eating, our driver announced his intention of going on But we insisted on having one hour's sleep Had I realised at the time that he was again only playing his part of importance, I would have slept very much more

An hour later, we were having coffee on the lawn in bright sunshine Around us in the garden were fruit trees of all kinds, orange, apricot, grape vines and a lot more The Consul's Secretary stood talking to us I had time to look around I saw, in the distance a magnificent range of mountains, some of the peaks covered with snow I told the Secretary how lovely the snow was on the mountain peaks His reply rather took me aback, for he said that we could not see snow-covered mountains from where we were I was afraid to pursue the matter as I suddenly thought my giddiness of a little while before must have arisen from some complaint of the eyes which I had developed I was relieved later on when a person in Kabul to whom I related the little episode, convinced me that I had been right and that in fact I had seen the snow-capped peaks of the Hindu Kush range

Jallalabad had a green loveliness, with a rich fertile look about it There were many tempting looking walled vineyards It seemed absurd therefore, to leave this haven of fertility behind us and deliberately enter the country in

which we now found ourselves For the country which was displayed before our eyes was nothing but a sea of brown stone and mud Only occasionally was the monotony broken by a black tent, the humble dwelling of those tribes which make seasonal migrations from one valley to another, always through the same mountain passes They mainly subsist by keeping camels and chickens, with an occasional bit of dacoity thrown in I heard later that they are expert camel breeders and do quite a good trade in them I thought I saw cactus growing near the summits of the hills, but on closer inspection, I found they were graveyards—very simple, consisting of a variation of long vertical and horizontal stones

The long vertical stones are the men's graves—the bigger and higher the stone the greater was the man's personality The flat horizontal ones are the women's The body is always buried with the face towards Mecca

The road turned gradually into a hill road, the car worked its way higher and higher up the barren mountainside From a height of 7,500 feet, the mountains seemed to lose their plainness and acquired a quality of beauty Through the clouds, one could see an ethereal blue mist haunting the valley I could not help being impressed by the hardness of the countryside, I thought with admiration of the gunners of old campaigns, who had to manhandle their guns through these forbidding mountains The oceans of barrenness which I saw aroused my sympathy for the tribes who had to wrest a living from this countryside Small wonder that they occasionally took to robbing and pillaging and did not count it any sin It was indeed problematical whether anything at all could be grown amongst the desert of stones.

Soon we were going downhill towards a valley, it started to rain and we put up a screen of raincoats round the open car Temporarily the rain stopped, only to start again with real fury this time Now it was a mixture of rain and hailstones as big as hazel nuts We were forced to stop and in a very few minutes the mild little stream down in the valley ahead had changed into a torrent of water Then from the bare hillside, water began to gush down, just in front of

us we watched the very foundations of the road being washed away It seemed rather illogical to stop and watch these powerful forces gradually hem us in on all sides, and perhaps trap us and we said as much to our driver But he was in a very stubborn mood and refused to go on

Gradually the rain-storm lessened and we had only gone a little way when we realised how wise our driver had been, for round the first bend we saw that the rain had washed the hillside on to the road It would not have been pleasant to have had a landslide on top of us We cleaned the loose mud from off the top of the road , the remaining few feet of stones and boulders we went over with difficulty From the road there was a sheer drop of hundreds of feet down into the valley below, where the river still rushed at a terrific speed, swollen with water It was an unpleasant thought, as we went along, that the road might give way at any moment

All this delayed us about a day , that did not matter in the least to any of us, but the driver seemed very upset We were still descending—down, down, into the valley Now we could see the hills above Kabul , Kabul itself was hidden away securely out of sight

At last we reached the bottom of the valley, only to find our progress barred by another river Here was a heaven-sent opportunity for the driver to get a grip on our lives again and he set about doing so in his usual way Unfortunately for him, just before he reached the river, a car came from the opposite direction and went through the river without difficulty Our driver was determined however not to be robbed of his opportunity and persisted in walking right through I told him again that I was sure he would catch pneumonia and this pleased him He purred with pride at the thought of the difficulties he had brought us through and I am sure he hoped that we would mention his sterling qualities to his employer We came to a village where we telephoned to our hosts in Kabul to expect us shortly, but said we needed more petrol Very soon a car arrived and our tank replenished we were piloted on the last lap of our journey into Kabul

for they were unused to seeing an unveiled woman in the streets

I saw good pieces of very blue lapis lazuli, one piece was very big and I was dying to ask the price But I dare not talk to the men when I had no purdah on Also, Tor was convinced that the stone was not real I was positive it was real however, for I had been told that it was to be found for the picking in the surrounding mountains My assertion was proved correct next day, when while out walking, we saw some people digging in the hillside for the stone

Kabul has one of the best climates in the world, it stands at about five thousand feet and has a dry and cold winter for ski-ing While we were enjoying the refreshing walk over the hills I asked our officer friend the origin of the name Kabul He laughed and said "Believe it or not, here is the story

"Old Noah had two sons Kakul and Habul. When they built a city they pondered over its name, at last they came to a happy compromise to combine the names Kakul and Habul to make Kabul"

The officer warned us to step carefully while walking across a graveyard, of which there are many outside Kabul, because the mud might give way I asked if they were hollow Our friend replied "They dig the graves with sufficient space for the corpse to sit up at ease' The dead have to answer questions put to them by angels who are supposed to find out all their good and bad deeds in their past lives

From the top of a hill we could see over two valleys In one lay the old town with its population of about eighty thousand and in the other lay an abortive new town built by King Amanullah He had chosen what certainly seemed the more fertile of the two valleys There right across the valley on the hillside opposite to us stood in ghostly splendour the unfinished palace We could see the six miles long approach avenue He had even laid tram tracks, to provide easy conveyance to his new Secretariat But it was a short-lived dream for his people disliked intensely the idea of modernizing the country His queen had moved

about freely, not in purdah, and to the dismay of the orthodox priests They disliked his new system of education too, and I felt sure that they feared that a spread of education would rob them of their tremendous power because the priests were big landowners The tramways were forcibly removed and broken to pieces, the beautiful palace and secretariat were never occupied And now these buildings have acquired a tradition of ill-luck

Strangely enough, the only building which is used is the museum, a fine building It was worthwhile going there, if only to see an old Persian black granite bowl It was about four inches thick and about four and a half-feet in diameter It stood at least four feet high and reminded me of the sort of bowl I had seen so often in pictures of Persian courts I tapped it with my finger nail and it tinkled as if made of porcelain It rested on a base of stone carved lotus leaves and was covered with beautiful writing It was a most attractive piece, but when my friend said "It always reminds me of the plate I had as a little boy, on which was written round the edge 'Eat your porridge and you will grow into a big boy,'" my aesthetic feeling for the bowl was dissolved in fits of laughter The beauty of Persian plates with inscriptions was spoiled for me after that I found out it was called Ali's begging bowl, or rather the priests' collecting bowl Judging from the size, the priests expected a lot.

When I was in Herat, I met an engineer who took me to a museum saying "You must come and see some old Persian writing Don't you think it looks like musical poetry You can almost see from the delicacy of the handwriting exactly what the scribe wants to express" I saw a poem framed and hanging on the wall and at first glance I really thought it was a painting The handwriting of another seemed to express anger for it looked like a thunderstorm In another, one could sense love in every stroke, it was so soft, appealing and sensitive

One of the great historical attractions of Kabul is the tomb of Baber the founder of the Moghal Empire It is on a picturesque spot with a beautiful garden He had asked to be buried there

He was in Delhi when he died His son Humayun was ill, after having fallen down the steps in the palace Baber prayed to God saying that he was willing to suffer his son's illness himself, thus sparing Humayun "I am old," said Baber, "what does it matter if I die?" He was only fifty years of age at the time Humayun recovered soon after this, while Baber got ill and died shortly afterwards

It was surprising to find a temple of a Hindu goddess in Kabul It is in fact the guardian diety of the Afghan capital, I was told Mothers with their newly born babies visit the temple which is known as "Aasmai" There is a big stone and a crude oil lamp kept constantly burning inside the temple

To go into a shop and see the most perfect Karakul* fur as much as you liked was a real treat One could dream of the most beautiful warm coats in either black or grey lamb Of course one could not help thinking of the poor mother-sheep who must die with the three or four months old lamb in her womb

We saw thousands of broad tail sheep ("Dumba" they are called and the lambs are called 'Burra") around the country Their tails were so broad that it looked as if half of their bodies were moving when they ran about The sheep are shorn twice a year and they give excellent wool

One of the Afghan delicacies is a well-cooked "Dumba" It is the privilege of the guest to kill it and the feast takes place with a big ceremony

People thought us rather crazy when we told them that we intended going to Kandahar by bus, but we explained that we thought this would be the best way of meeting the people of the country as we wished to do

We went down to the bus office and booked our seats three days in advance To make quite sure about the seats we went down again after a day or two when we were told that we would have to wait three more days because all the buses were fully booked This seemed most unlikely

* Karakul — Persian lamb

to us but our hosts told us that it was quite possible that we would have to wait another month before we could get seats Actually we did not mind very much as it was very enjoyable staying where we were

CHAPTER IV

THE ROAD TO GHAZNI

Eventually the day came for our departure When we saw the bus we were supposed to travel in it seemed impossible that it could take any more people, for it was already crammed full. The Legation car which took us to the bus waited to make certain that the bus had not already left for in this country that could easily have happened

I was delighted to get the front seat for which I had asked and felt very well off as I relaxed with the added comfort of my big pillow and a small cushion behind by head

The number of people the bus could take seemed to be countless for by now there were about twice as many as when we arrived Our luggage was piled on the roof and that was the end of our precious bottles of fruit juice At last after endless delays we were off As one does on these occasions, I looked very attentively at the streets and wondered when I would see Kabul again The edge was rather taken off my last minute sentimental outlook for the bus had only gone a short distance when it stopped The driver of course looked inside the engine and I felt sure that we were going to have a slow journey with a capricious engine I was relieved therefore when I heard that we were waiting for the mail.

Here, I thought, was an opportunity to get friendly with the women in burqa who were sitting behind me One of them had a small baby and I gave it my perfume bottle to play with. I opened the bottle so that the baby could smell the perfume but his mother immediately snatched it out of his hands and put the scent on her blouse under her burqa Another woman did the same with the scent bottle and I

could see that both got a great thrill out of it My guess was that they were not supposed to put on any scent during Ramzan for when I offered them the scent a second time, this time after the arrival of their husbands, the men shook their heads in censorious disapproval and the women dared not take any But after that the ice was broken and we understood each other

The Afghans more or less purchase their wives—the man is about twenty years old when he marries while the girl is about sixteen The richer people marry at an earlier age —or as soon as they can afford to keep a family

The girls are usually chosen, and matches are made through elderly female relatives But the contract of marriage that is made must however be agreed to by the woman as well as the man The man of course has no opportunity to see his wife-to be before he marries her

If the husband dies before the wife, the brother of the husband has a preferential claim on the widow Anyone who wants to marry her must have his consent But the widow can refuse to marry if she does not want to A husband can divorce his wife without assigning any reason whatsoever

Polygamy is allowed by Mohammadan law but to the extent of four wives only

It is said that no census has yet been attempted in the country, because it is considered bad manners to ask the names or the number of women in the house

At last the driver came back with the mail bag but still there was no sign of our going An old man with a long white beard came along and looked at the bus To me it looked completely full but when the old man saw that the tool box beside the driver was empty he laid his bundle there and there was no doubt in his mind that he would get that seat The seat really belonged to the bus cleaner so I was surprised that the driver said nothing when the old man stepped into the bus and sat down with a proprietary air

Now we were off it seemed for good this time Every one was settled and the bus packed to the last inch Imagine

my surprise when we stopped again immediately outside the town to pick up more passengers They all went on the roof, however, and I think they made a bit of extra profit for the driver

The road lay through a green and fertile valley We met donkeys loaded with fruit dignified camels carrying their colourful camel bags The baby camels became very frightened when they saw us and ran off the road in wild gallops The mothers looked furious over the misbehaviour of their children In the country between Kandahar and Kabul live the tribes whose chief occupation is the breeding of camels and we saw many herds of camels on the way

We made a terrible noise going along It was a very old bus and everything in it rattled and I had the feeling that after two hundred miles of driving on those bumpy roads we would find ourselves with only the chassis left

I opened the little side window beside me to get some fresh air, but after a mile or two it shut again back at the same old place I got quite annoyed to start with but after a while became used to opening it to be able to breathe at all in the heat.

The old bus shook its way along the valley In a field a hen got very alarmed when she heard us coming I do not blame her She thought she had better run for it but apparently she could not tell where the noise was coming from for she ran for her life right in front of the bus just as if she wanted to commit suicide I thought to myself 'Please God look after the innocent but make no excuses for the stupid'

Eventually we came to the end of the valley and found ourselves in the desert country where the only signs of fertility were small green patches round the villages The village people enjoyed themselves when the bus arrived They crowded round to sell us melons and grapes and other fruit In the villages were tea shops run by big Pathans where as an added attraction they staged cock fights Strutting across the round platform outside the tea houses were massive cocks all ready for a fight. The cocks were just as proud of their physical strength as the people themselves

Their legs were very long and thick and their bodies strong, but some of them which had very few feathers left looked very much the worse for wear

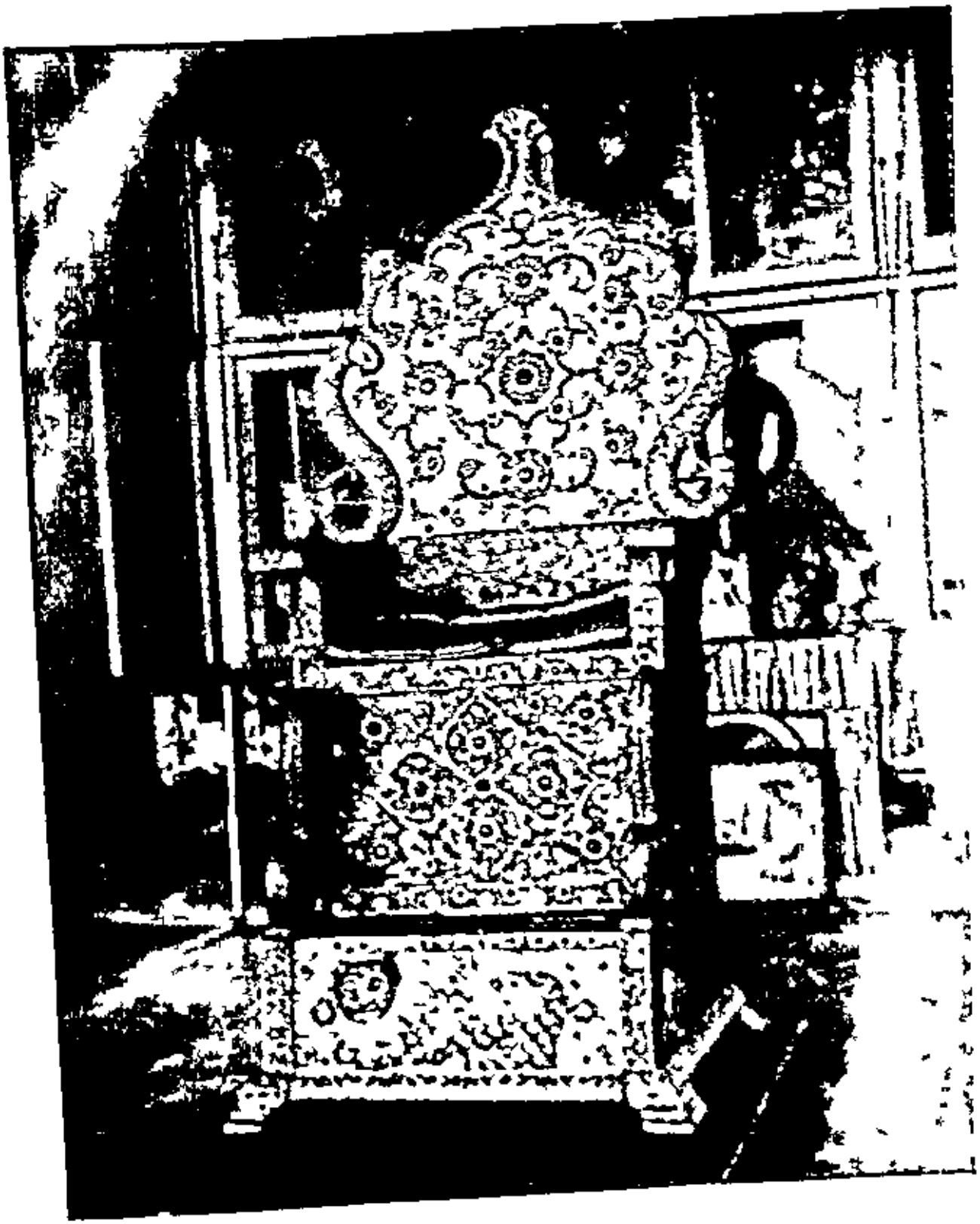
Another attraction was the egg game The idea was to put the points of the eggs towards each other and press very hard If a person was disliked, sometimes a bad egg was used

When we stopped at these villages it was usual for the men to get out of the bus and for the women to remain, so I was able to talk to them alone The woman with the baby uncovered her face and smiled to me She looked very beautiful, her skin was as fresh and rosy as that of a Nordic woman and just as fair She had red lips and expressive blue eyes with brown hair and altogether she looked like a lovely painting Her mother, who sat next to her, was also most charming to talk to but I never got a chance to see her face I think the less attractive women must love purdah for they are able to hide their plainness Both of my friends signified that it was very hot beneath their veils and they obviously envied my uncovered state

The husband of the woman with the child came back with some nice ripe apples which they pressed me to have They themselves, poor things, could not eat anything until the sun had set because of Ramzan I pointed to my watch and told them there were not many hours left before they could eat and drink. I accepted the apples and they all laughed again and seemed to enjoy my pleasure in eating them

Ramzan is the ninth month in the Mohammadan year Mohammad used to retire in this month to a cave for meditation and prayer The Quran was at this time communicated to him That is why it has become a season of great sanctity

During this month the Mohammadans are supposed to read through the Quran and strict fast is kept between sunrise and sunset The fast is understood in many ways The Prophet's idea was that people should think of their poor and give them one or two meals a day instead of eating it themselves.



THE PEACOCK THRONE IN TEHERAN

me that I had quite a large audience I looked round and found twenty-five Pathans on one side of the bus and about ten on the other, all of them standing staring at me I looked at one of them straight in the eyes but he did not look away That made me feel very uncovered so I put on my goggles and, in spite of the hot weather, my coat also to cover up my arms I was embarrassed by all the attention so I took out some sandwiches to have something to do It was a good idea, anyway, for I was very hungry, but as I sat there pouring out tea from my thermos and eating sandwiches, I felt exactly like a monkey in a cage The man with the persistent stare rather frightened me, for he came right into the bus and I knew that he was not a passenger Small wonder that the people became so alarmed when the King gave orders for the abolition of the purdah system I had a last look at the historical little town before we set off again.

After about ten minutes, however, we stopped in front of a little mosque just outside the town An old priest (Mulla) with a white beard was kneeling in prayer on a carpet in the mosque garden and I felt there was something very beautiful in the undisturbed nature of the Mohammadan worship The priest in the garden and the old man sitting on the tool box in the bus were so alike that I had to look twice to see if perhaps the latter had somehow got in front of us But the old man on the tool box was still there Presently he roused himself from sleep but he still looked as if his mind was very far away and I blamed the two very thick winter coats which he wore, one on top of the other It was rather fortunate though that he wore a very thick turban, for in his sleep he kept falling forward with his head on the wooden dashboard of the bus

Eventually this old man rose and with great dignity left the bus The driver salaamed him most respectfully and as there was dead silence in the bus I got the impression that he was a Mulla He asked the driver how much it was for the day's trip but the driver just waved his hand as if to say "nothing at all—it was a pleasure

The young car assistant now became very busy He took off the boiling hot radiator cap with his bare hands If I

had done it I would have burnt myself, but he wanted to show off Then he brought an attractively shaped earthenware vase filled with water and after pouring water into the radiator he threw the vase with the exuberance of youth in a garden where it broke to pieces He laughed heartily as did all the other youths in the bus while the older people remained completely silent. The driver spoke to him sharply but the youth, determined to establish his personality, answered him back rudely

After this we went off again and the driver drove much faster The other people in the bus too became talkative and there was a gayer atmosphere all round

Suddenly there was a bang like a pistol shot and I noticed that some of the women ducked and held their hands in front of their faces I was sure that it was a hold-up, but unfortunately just an ordinary puncture which of course was serious enough, for tyres were extremely difficult to obtain in Afghanistan Out we all had to crowd

By the roadside ran a cool clear stream which looked like spring water and we all rushed for it I felt very hot and dusty so I sat down and washed my face and neck which for me was a natural thing to do I had forgotten that I was a woman in Afghanistan and one young boy who sat near me said in a very quiet voice "Don't be frightened" Whether I was supposed to be frightened of the water or of him, I do not know but his voice sounded very sweet

I washed the grapes we had brought with us and poured diluted potassium permanganate over them and with Afghan bread they made a glorious meal Mending the tyre was a long job so we had leisure to contemplate the country around us

My impression of the country from the bus had been of a desert, but now when I looked at it again I saw people ploughing the fields and stacking the corn which had been already harvested The vivid colour of the corn stacks broke up the monotony of the desert

An Officer of the Afghan army, who gave us the impression that he had been deputed to watch us, spread out his carpet to pray The man in the Astrakhan cap joined him,

Persian Wine Shop

One thing I am positive about is that the Prophet did not mean them to fill themselves with food as soon as the sun sets, and keep on getting up in the night to feed again and again as some do

The night feeds are opened by prayers The poor people are in fact very badly struck because they keep strictly to the day fasting and cannot afford to feed at night The country people are very sincere They do not take a drop of water or even swallow the moisture of the mouth, so it happens that young people suffer intensely in the heat Others again exclude themselves from all wordly conversation and read the Quran

After a while I could see we were approaching a big town which turned out to be the historic city of Ghazni It was exactly like a town from medieval times The old town was perched right on top of a hill and surrounded by a high wall The entrance to the town was through a magnificent gateway thronged with people, camels and donkeys It was the right background for burqa clad women and toga clad men

Ghazni has a bracing climate, being on a plateau about seven thousand feet high The snow lies on the ground from about November to the middle of March The country around Ghazni is of remarkable fertility where tobacco and cotton are grown as well as vegetables and fruit

It was from this place that Mahmud of Ghazni invaded India twenty-six times Every time he looted rich capitals and temples and brought the treasures back with him There are still two towers from his time in exquisite brick-work near the town Below the towers is a popular place to go hunting for precious stones It happens that one can sometimes find some remains from the jewellery bazaars of olden times which used to be round the two minars

On his deathbed Mahmud ordered all his jewellery to be brought and displayed before him He gazed at it with weeping eyes but ordered the whole lot to be locked up again without having the heart to give anything away to his people

The bus had stopped and I was so engrossed in the beauty of the old town that I did not notice till Tor nudged

after removing his shoes of course It was so entertaining watching them all that I did not notice the length of time which it took to mend the tyre What did time matter anyhow ? They all seemed to enjoy having a turn of pumping the old fashioned pump which was being used to blow up the tyre and this gave the witty heads a chance to crack jokes over the clumsiness of some of them

CHAPTER V

RAMZAN EVENING

Off again through another small village where we met more tribes with camels They streamed through the street and I saw small boys running fast to collect the providential bounty dropped by the camels It must have been of great value because the small boys risked being kicked to death when they crept right underneath the camels or was it, like everywhere else in the world, a matter of sport amongst the boys ? One little boy was very sweet He was so busy looking at us that he forgot what his basket contained and planted himself right in the middle of it to sit and stare

Next we stopped for petrol at an old pump I was asked to get up as the petrol tank was situated right underneath me The woman with the baby went over to a stream to wash the child I followed her and we played with the baby in the water which he loved He cried heart-rendingly when we took him away

Back in the bus I showed the women the cosmetics in my bag as I thought it was a good way of entertaining them I in turn was interested in one of their beauty preparations —an everlasting nail polish and their husbands explained that it was a preparation made from juice extracted from tree bark and was usually put on at weddings I remarked it would be a marvellous innovation in war time but they did not seem to catch the point Of course the world war meant nothing at all to them

I showed them photographs of my children and the women were very thrilled by them. The husband tried very hard to find the right English words to express him self but he was unable to do so at that moment. My daughter's hair is the colour of corn and I tried hard to explain but it was difficult because of the fact there there was no corn in the fields nearby

The bus had speeded up because they wanted to reach a certain village immediately after sunset so that they could eat as soon as Ramzan permitted Suddenly I felt some one tapping me on the shoulder and the husband leaned over to me and said in pure English with a deep Afghan voice "Your daughter is beautiful and she has golden hair' It sounded like a piece of poetry and I was very touched We had established a mutual understanding between us

I glanced behind me into the bus and there they were all sitting watching the setting sun eager to have their evening meal I can easily understand why people say "You must be careful with an Afghani during Ramzan They are very easily upset" I would be the same if I were to eat nothing all day At this point a great argument arose, the driver seemed to be in acute disagreement with the others There was a great deal of back-chat and eventually the driver stopped the bus. Apparently the argument had arisen over the desire of the passengers to pray before the sun had set too low The Afghan Army officer led the way again but I noticed that many of the young boys never moved out of the bus at all. I sat down by the roadside and enjoyed another apple and thanked my lucky star that I had not been born in a country where Ramzan was observed

It was a magnificent sight to see these powerfully built tribesmen kneeling in prayer towards the setting sun and it certainly was good exercise for them especially for the fat ones The Officer s cap looked very drab beside the galaxy of colours which the turbans made and I thought how honest and innocent they looked

We all went back into the bus again because now we had very little time in which to reach the village just as the last golden rays from the sun were leaving the last cloud in the sky They said they could not eat before that

The bus shook along as fast as it could and soon some houses became visible in the distance We had barely come to a stand-still before all the men and myself crowded out of the bus to buy tea, bread and melons Our sandwiches and coffee tasted better when we knew all the others could enjoy their food too

I went over to the ladies again who sat inside the bus eating some kind of pancake-bread and one of them offered me a piece to eat, which I accepted It tasted very good but I was frightened to death in case I should get typhoid or smallpox for I had noticed that the baby she had in her arms looked as if it had not quite recovered from smallpox I noticed too that the mother had fresh marks on her arms

The sweet and cultured Afghan women have very little education They have a superstition against women learning to read and write, thanks to one Malik's daughter She was famed for her beauty and knowledge and was in love with her father's enemy, a great conqueror, who laid siege to the Malik's fort The princess wrote letters which she fastened to arrows and shot them from the tower of the fort over to the enemy In one of them she disclosed the source of the "Carez" * The Malik was forced to surrender when the water was stopped The conqueror then married the Malik's daughter

But the conqueror got frightened He thought his wife would betray him as she had betrayed her father He therefore ordered her execution She is always given as a bad example and the prejudice against education of girls remains strong

The men sat in large circles around bowls of food and I felt greatly tempted to go and see what sort of food they were eating It would have been bad manners however, to have intruded on their privacy but even their backs, which alone were visible, conveyed an unmistakable impression of hearty release

After this feasting the atmosphere in the bus was more settled and contented and talk was soft and nerves relaxed

* "Carez —means an ancient underground canal which supplies villages with water all the year round

Meanwhile darkness had fallen and the moon had risen I was too tired to ponder over the beauties of the moonlit landscape and I sat back and fell asleep Not too long, however, because the Pathan who sat beside Tor fell forward and his magnificent turban bumped hard against my head He was very confused when he awoke and realised what had happened After that Tor and I erected a barricade of cushions round us and we were able to sleep well. Now and again I awoke to see whether the driver looked like falling asleep but I might have spared myself the trouble for he looked as if he could keep wide-awake for a long time

About midnight I was awakened by a great deal of chatter in the bus Our arrival in a small village had caused the excitement and as we passed along the main street I felt as if one of Hans Andersen's fairy-tales had come to life Tea shop after tea shop lined the little street, all of them lit up by lamps and containing samovars so enormous that they seemed to have been especially fashioned to match the size of the men The flickering light from the fireplace where delicious bread was being baked gave a marvellous stage effect of shadow and dancing colour I had to pinch myself to make sure that this was real and not a dream

In front of the shops stood trees with benches and long tables underneath them They brought us carpets to sit on. We had seated ourselves comfortably when Tor dropped his stick and searching underneath the bench we discovered that we were seated on the very edge of a big ditch full of water I was alarmed for I could picture ourselves being the victims of some unhappy plot and imagined the bench being tilted up by some fiendish mechanism and all of us landing in the water It was not until the stick was retrieved and I saw that there were ditches for drawing water all over the village that I settled down peacefully again

The driver ordered tea for us and while we were waiting for it a magnificent Pathan offered us a melon. A melon is delicious when you are thirsty and this one was very juicy The driver brought us some bread and placed it on

the carpet He asked me if I preferred it roasted and I said I did, but secretly I hoped it would come back to me touched by as few hands as possible The bread turned out to be very good and along with it I ate some sweet bread which the driver had also produced The mixture of the two kinds of bread made an appetising meal The brew of tea was excellent but to have tea served in such miniature cups by such giant men seemed very incongruous

Every one was friendly and kind The other occupants of the bus all sat around us, but they no longer stared for by now they had become used to me One of the local policemen, however, stood staring very fixedly at me and seemed to have forgotten all about his police duties The party of women as usual sat inside the bus, this time on the far side which was in darkness and their food was brought to them The father looked after the baby while the mother had her food I noticed three huge tribesmen from the desert drinking tea They looked very fine dacoits and I could well imagine that they were efficient at their job That type of work however has become less attractive since the King passed an order for the right hand of all apprehended robbers to be cut off and there had been a distinct decline in popularity of this type of occupation

We took a stroll up and down the street and every baker seemed to be busy baking a fresh supply of bread against the arrival of the next load of hungry people There was a great trade in bread for people who had been in the desert all day and had eaten nothing because of Ramzan, came into the villages to gorge in the evening When we came to pay for our tea we were surprised when the driver said "Oh, not at all, you are my guests" I am afraid we suspected his hospitality and that his real intention was to induce us to give him a bigger tip the next day He had us there for we did not like to protest

Off we went again out into the dark night I sat watching the driver He looked tired, but I was pleased to see that he had a spare driver sitting next to him on the box so I was able to fall asleep with some peace of mind I was awakened soon however, by the slam of the driver's door The bus had stopped and the driver had just gone out

I opened the door beside me to get some fresh air but I did not get it for the door was blocked by a huge white-cloaked tribesman who looked like a colossal ghost in the darkness He must have been huge for his head reached as high as mine and remember that I was seated on top of a cushion in the front seat of a high bus He spoke to me which made me rather suspicious and I was stupid enough to close the door right in his face At that he went away to return with another man and then I realised that he only wanted to examine our permits At every little village we had this examination of permits and on these occasions I always wondered whether it was a careful check or if it was done out of curiosity

I was much too tired to be interested in the villages we were passing through or in the beautiful moonlit country The only thing which kept me awake was the look of extreme tiredness on the driver's face but he was wise enough to let the spare driver take a spell at the wheel

I lost confidence in the new driver right at the start for at the first small hill he came to he missed the gear change which he had tried to make too late in any case I was wide awake by this time for I thought that if the foot brake of the bus were in keeping with the rest of the bus it would not be very efficient By this time we had started to go backwards and I immediately seized the handbrake and pulled it on hard No one else knew of our near catastrophe for they were all asleep They soon awoke however when the driver changed into first gear because this made a terrific noise I was very pleased to have been able to use that hand brake for it had been annoying me all night My legs kept getting entangled in it and every time I awoke I found one of my legs numb It was only when the first driver took over again that I fell soundly asleep and I did not awake till sunrise

Soon I realised that we were drawing near to Kandahar The name Kandahar has always fascinated me I looked round but still I could see on both sides of the valley nothing more interesting than the khaki coloured mountains and I thought I had not missed much during the night but soon

I could see green trees in the distance and now the Customs House, a little bungalow with a small garden and a well

There on the verandah lay the Customs Officer, reclining in glory while he ordered his juniors to run around and do his job for him He stayed comfortably in bed meanwhile and I presume went off to sleep again as soon as we had left First of all he tried to persuade us to go over to him, but when he caught sight of our permits his curiosity must have been very great indeed for it was sufficient to get him out of bed to come over and have a look at us He made a great deal of fuss and wanted to keep the permits We did not relish the idea of being without our permits, but the driver assured us that they would be handed back to us later on and we had to give way on the point.

CHAPTER VI

KANDAHAR

We drove through the old city and on into the new part The towns in Afghanistan usually have a "new town" planned outside the old city walls We arrived at the market place and again we were the sensation of the morning, I felt like a rare specimen of monkey arriving at the zoo

It was very sad to say good bye to the bus and to all its occupants I felt I knew them all so well and the sufferings of the three hundred and ten miles journey had cemented our friendship

It cheered me up, however, when I was told that some of my fellow passengers were going on to Herat in the same bus as ourselves

The market looked interesting and I was loath to leave it, but by now so many people had gathered round us that we were glad to have our luggage put into tongas and to escape to the British Consulate We said good bye to the driver and gave him extra tips and offered him money for our tea

on the previous evening but he refused to take it We still thought that there was some catch in it but the hospitality proved to be genuine All Afghanis reckon foreigners as their guests and as it had been the driver's responsibility to look after us on the trip he looked upon himself as our host He had been very helpful indeed and we were glad to have the opportunity a week later in Herat to put in a good word for him to the Director-General for Roads in Afghanistan.

They knew at the Consulate that we were due but as it was nine o'clock of a Ramzan morning all its occupants were still asleep It was not long, however, before we had a most necessary bath followed by a lovely breakfast when for the first time I tasted Kandahar grapes I could not have imagined it possible to get better grapes than those we had tasted in Kabul but these had really been sunkissed There was a special guest house attached to the Consulate where we were installed After eating we went to bed and slept until lunch time The Consul, of Indian nationality, proved to be a most charming and interesting host who, prior to his transfer to Afghanistan, had lived in Persia for twelve years

After lunch he took us for a drive to the old city which at one time had fallen to the conquering armies of Alexander the Great You could still see big ruined walls and it was not difficult to reassemble them in one's imagination into the form of fantastic castles I could already see a princess sitting on the balcony, eagerly expecting her prince I imagined him galloping at full speed towards the castle, mounted on a magnificent Afghan stallion richly bejewelled, armed to the teeth—all to impress the sweetest lady in the land My dream did not last long because the Consul explained that if we wished to see the view from the top of the mountain—Baber's Mountain as it was called—we would have to be quick for the sun was already beginning to set.

We drove up the mountainside as far as the road would take us and from there walked to a point where we came to steps hewn out of the rock. The Consul told us that this was the spot where in 1505 Baber took refuge with ten of his confederates for two weeks, later to emerge, raise his battle standard in the neighbouring countryside and go on to

conquer the northern part of India I walked up the very steep steps to the top of the mountain and saw the small natural cave in which Baber lay in hiding Except to the north, where a barrier of mountains limited one's view, you could see as far as the eye could reach The view was one of the most inspiring I have ever seen and I could easily understand how the dream of a Moghal Empire had been conceived on this spot

Now the sun was going down behind the mountains and throwing long shadows across the beautiful, fertile valley of Kandahar, a valley whose fertility made for happiness and contentment amongst its inhabitants Small wonder that Baber conjured up dreams of conquest when, looking out from his nest across the valley, he saw all those green gardens lush with pomegranates, apricots, peaches, grapes, and well-irrigated fields filled with the most delicious melons

From the top of the mountain it was easy to see into the courtyards of the houses The houses of the rich were built in an attractive style of architecture with a big courtyard to enable the women of the house to move about, but even at that I could not help thinking that the poorer women, most of whom worked in the fields, were much better off for they were not compelled to live in purdah and as a result, looked very strong, sunburnt and healthy

I was sorry to leave the inspiring surroundings of Baber's cave and I retraced my steps down the steep broad steps with some regret The car took us through the gardens I had seen from the top of the hill and on to a spot outside the town where there was a swimming pool surrounded by terraces of flowers and a cascade which flowed into a round pond covered with lotus flowers It was a scene which Cezanne would have enjoyed

The gardeners were just coming to pray by the side of the lotus pond and when they knelt their figures were reflected in the clear water On the ground beside them they placed their long stemmed pipes along with the big green and yellow melons with which they would break their fast as soon as they had finished praying All was peace and quiet and the church of the gardeners, this green valley illuminat-

ed by the dying rays of the sun, was for us more beautiful than any man-built church in the world

We slept well that night for the nights in Kandahar are cool Next morning after breakfast we went through the town to the bank to draw some money The bank was an old building in which most of the windows were broken The driver called for some one on the first floor, but a policeman in a building across the road shouted to him that it was a holiday and we came to the conclusion that they were celebrating the last Friday of Ramzan There was nothing we could do about it for we were now in a country where time as such had no meaning and what could not be done today could just as well wait until tomorrow

The Consul, a Mohammadan, kept us company at every meal for there are some rather charming rules in the Mohammadan creed If you are unwell you are allowed to eat in the day time and the Consul told us he felt rather unwell at present I suppose you are forgiven so long as illness does not appear too regularly during Ramzan

At the bus stand we were told that the bus would leave at four o'clock in the afternoon, but the Consul said that the occupants of the bus would not go before they had broken their fast This would mean a delay of two or three hours more so we went for a walk We had already sent a tonga with our luggage to the bus stand and as we came to the gate of the Consulate we met the tonga coming back still loaded with our luggage We were then told that as there was a holiday there was no mail and the bus would therefore not leave until tomorrow We enjoyed our walk the more after that for we could look forward to at least one more restful night in a good bed

When we came in for dinner that evening there were two other men in the drawing room—one turned out to be the Consul's brother and the other the Consul's secretary After a while I asked them why their wives were not with them and remarked that I liked the women folk of the country very much from what I had seen of them Both their wives were in purdah and one of them said that his wife who had been used to more freedom in India suffered a great deal in Afghanistan

He went on to tell me of an occasion when Mohammad was walking in the street accompanied by a woman in purdah and on meeting one of his disciples said to him "Come here my son" and lifting the woman's veil showed the disciple that it was in fact his wife who accompanied him Many people in the street noticed the incident and that the disciple recognised Mohammad's wife

"But how could the disciple have known it was Mohammad's wife if he had not seen her before?" I asked He laughed and was anxious to see if I had understood the cleverness of Mohammad Then he added sweetly "So you see Mohammad did not object to women showing their faces"

I asked him what he thought of Christianity He paused for a moment and then said with what I thought a great deal of truth "We recognise Christianity of course and it is very akin to our religion but most Mohammadans thinks that Christianity tends to be an exclusive religion partly because it does not seem to recognise many of the tenets of the Mohammadan belief

"Of course," he continued "Mohammadans do not believe that Christ was crucified We believe God would never allow a prophet such as Jesus to die the same death as a criminal We believe someone else was crucified in his place Jesus' friend asked if he would be allowed to bury him in his own garden and he put a Roman guard there Naturally it was all pre-arranged for I do not believe people were any better in those days Then as now, they could easily be bribed

"When Mary sat crying beside the grave Jesus came over to her from the corner of the garden and said 'Do not cry, I am here with you' Later he left the country, taking his mother with him and they walked all through Persia and Afghanistan and over to Kashmir, at that time a famous seat of philosophical learning" He said that Jesus is believed to have lived there to the age of seventy two I listened to the story with great interest as I was surprised to hear the same story in Kandahar which a philosophically-minded Hindu in Sonemarg (Kashmir) had told me two months earlier This Hindu had also told me that Christ's mother

is believed to have died at Murree—a hill station not far from Rawalpindi on the way to Kashmir—hence its name He continued "I am told there is a tomb in Srinagar where it is said that Jesus was buried"

I told him I had been there two months previously and had seen the tomb But little did I know then that it seemed to be a common belief in the East

The grave was on the way out from Srinagar, towards Nagin Bagh The temple, built round the grave, was in a good Kashmir style of architecture—wooden roof with grass on top, wooden sides half way down and the bottom half built of stone In the middle of one big room was a wooden sarcophagus inside which was a tomb which looked like an ordinary Mohammadan grave Beside the tomb was a block of stone on which were the imprints of human feet supposed to be those of Christ One thing I noticed was that they were the imprints of very big feet and that all the toes seemed to be of almost equal length On the wooden sarcophagus were some words written in Persian supposed to be by another prophet who lived at the same time as Christ did I had it translated by a Kashmiri but I cannot vouch for the accuracy of the translation —

Ziarat Us-Asaf, Khanayari
Khawaja Mohamad Azam
Dedamari in his history
"Waqaat-i-Kashmir
Nasir-ud-din khanyari

States as follows —

There is a tomb stone in its vicinity which is known as the tomb of the Holy Prophet who had in ancient times been to Kashmir, his name was Us Saf (Us Asaf)

They were all very interested to hear that I had seen the tomb and one of them said "There you have the proof"

So I said "Well you are ready to believe this story at once Why couldn't this story have been made up as so many others have been" He just shook his head and laughed

I went on to talk about the stubborn character and good physique of the Afghani He told me with some pride of

the great difficulties Alexander the Great had encountered in Kabul in subduing the Afghanis, of how Alexander's mother wrote chiding him that such a great man as he was did not seem to be able to master the Afghanis In reply, instead of a letter, he despatched to his mother three of the biggest Afghanis he could find to show her the type of men he had to handle The queen called them before her and asked if her son had sent any gift by their hand They showed her three boxes they had brought, each containing Afghan soil She was very angry because they had brought nothing of greater value and ordered them from her presence The Afghanis threw the soil out of the boxes on the floor and proclaimed that they were standing on their own soil "No one can remove us except by killing us," they said She was very impressed with their attitude and realised then what her son had to deal with

Tor had a walk early next morning It did not last long for I soon heard his footsteps outside and the noise of a tonga coming to the door "The bus is leaving in an hour's time," he shouted, "you must hurry" Very soon everything was packed and we rushed through our breakfast The cook of the house, who combined car driving with his normal functions, took Tor and some of the luggage down to the bus Meanwhile I talked to my friend of the night before I did not care whether the bus had left or not Tor came flying back again to say that the bus had already left but they had promised to wait for us by a petrol pump outside the town It seemed to me that they were not keen on taking us at all but after a short time the Consul took us in his car out to the petrol pump and we arrived there just in time to show our permits before the bus started

CHAPTER VII

DOWN TO THE HELMAND

I sat down on my soft cushion on the front seat again but I did not know quite where to put my legs for all around me on the floor were petrol tins, my small suit case, two

thermos flasks and two large hand grips Tor was seated beside me on a bedding roll with his back against the bus door, which did not close properly, and with his feet resting uncomfortably amongst the petrol tins The driver, seeing our acute discomfort, removed the tins and off we went

The bus from Kabul had seemed to be almost on its last legs but now I realised it had been comparatively luxurious This bus was a joke for now I felt as if I was seated on some vehicle which was making its final journey to the scrap-heap It creaked and groaned as it crept along and I fully expected the roof to fall down any minute, for when we went uphill the roof moved backwards about a foot. It usually returned to its correct place, but not before it had moved to the left and to the right The melons on the roof rolled all over it and the water chaguls, hanging outside to keep cool, banged vigorously against the windows There was a big hole in the roof too, and that added to our consternation so that in the end I thought it would be a wise precaution to put on my topi in case the roof came down

Tor started to look hurriedly through some papers and he realised that we had not had our road permits returned to us Without them we could get nowhere We asked the driver about it but he did not look in the least concerned and I wondered if this was part of the game But presently the driver stopped the bus and shouted to a man on the roof who came down and I realised that the intention was that this man should walk back and get the permits This seemed to us a surprising arrangement for we had already driven quite a distance from Kandahar and naturally we wondered how the man would be able to catch us up again

Off we went again, rolling along as happily as ever but soon the bus stopped at a spot with a small stream on our left and a vineyard surrounded by a big wall on our right. The driver got out, looked at the tyres and told us we could relax until four o'clock in the afternoon which was in six hours time We had been warned that anything might happen, so we accepted the situation philosophically and went in search of the most comfortable spot where we could lie down and rest. I at least made sure that we lay

down ahead of the bus so that they could have no excuse for leaving us behind

It was pleasant to lie underneath the trees, feeding the fish in the clear stream I am afraid I did not give them much of my food because really they were better off than we were, having the desert in front of us I gave them what I thought was a reasonable ration Tor of course slept immediately He lay flat while I sat up and watched the life going on around us Some of our fellow passengers seemed very interested in the vineyard and had climbed over the high wall Others were bathing in the river Passing by us on the road were donkeys and camels laden with grapes and among the camels I saw a pure white one I had never seen a white camel so I was very thrilled It did not have one single black spot on its skin and looked more regal than usual as it walked along in the distinguished way that camels have The blue beads round its neck and the coloured head dress added to its distinction and I am sure the owner felt very proud of it

Even the donkeys are big in Afghanistan, and one passed us carrying a beautifully embroidered saddle and wore blue beads and bells round its neck One can easily understand why the inhabitants of such a drab country long for colour Gay turbans, coloured clothing and red shoes are frequently seen

A tonga arrived and in it was the man who had gone back for our permits He gave them to us and laughed and seemed to have enjoyed the extra trip We paid for the tonga, of course, but there was no question of bakshish A beggar passed us but he did not ask for money either He salaamed us, and as he started to wash himself in the river rights in front of us I am sure he thought I was a man for I was wearing slacks and my topi was on my head, so he did not see my hair Some of our friends from the bus however, soon told him to go higher up the river

Our travelling companions came up and talked to us One young boy told me he was a mechanic from Jallalabad and had been educated in Kabul He had a Studebaker in which he could go from Kandahar to Herat in one day At the speed we were making we calculated it would take us

about three or four days. The Afghan Army officer came over too and soon we had a crowd round us, all enjoying a friendly talk, and being an officer, shopkeeper or mechanic did not matter as long as the conversation was interesting That was another characteristic I liked in the people of Afghanistan

It was much cooler when we set off about five o'clock in the afternoon and in fact it was pleasant to drive out into the desert again The landscape was varied today by the presence of the river, along the banks of which grew green grass, but on the whole I felt we were driving through a waste land As I was brought up in a fertile, cultivated land a barren countryside always depresses me but my depression soon seemed out of place when we arrived at one of these charming little villages with nicely shaped houses picturesque wells, and inhabited by happy country folk whose main occupation seemed to be selling juicy melons to thirsty travellers At every little place the men rushed out to have a smoke but even taking Ramzan into account I could not understand how they succeeded in not yielding to temptation in the shape of those juicy melons

The chief aim of fasting is to teach self control leading to a strengthening of character, but I suppose it must make the one who fasts reflect now and again on the starving condition of many of his fellow countrymen Certainly the ceremony of praying kept our companions all very busy during the trip, especially those on the bus roof who had to climb down every time I too enjoyed the evening prayer time for it gave me an opportunity to sit quietly and reflect on the beauty of the setting sun and on the subtle colour of the mountains

Sometimes the effect of the evening mist in the valleys was to make the mountains look as if they were floating in the air As I sat there that evening a caravan passed by My thoughts went back to my childhood when I used to dream of being in the desert with a caravan and here I was now sitting listening to the camel bells each bell with a different note and all of them combining to make a lovely desert song A friend of mine once told me that he tried to buy one of the camel bells in a caravan He offered quite

The hotel was something like the bridge—it would have been marvellous if it had been finished and well looked after The bathrooms were lovely, with fine wash basins, long baths and up-to-date sanitary arrangements, but no matter how hard you pulled on the chain no water came It was the same with the taps

We opened the big french windows on both sides of the bedrooms and soon fell asleep on the comfortable beds whose sheets had obviously been slept on by a number of people before us Our sleep was interrupted when a servant knocked at the door and brought tea and some hurricane lamps I am sure they thought we observed Ramzan too

The night was cool and we slept well until some more tea was brought, but this time to the occupants of a room across the corridor Apparently they could do well on tea for they were singing and talking as loudly as if it had been daytime But I rather enjoyed the impression of company as I felt rather lonely in the big empty hotel for Tor was sleeping like a log I must have fallen off to sleep again because I suddenly awoke in a great state of alarm when two men passed our windows

I immediately thought it was the driver and his mate from our bus and that the bus would go off without us I woke Tor and told him but he was not interested He merely said "Let them go," rolled over and was soon snoring again After that I was only able to toss fitfully to and fro for the servants kept talking loudly and laughing Then the moon went down and all the cocks in the neighbourhood started crowing and even the servants tried to keep them quiet But the cocks in this country are mighty fellows and they just kept on crowing

At half past eight Tor awoke and I think he must have suddenly realised the significance of what I had told him in the night for he dressed in no time and ran out of the room I thought I had been left behind and ran after him The first thing we tried to find out was if the two other guests in the hotel had left but, thank God, they were still there We were very relieved and ordered a big breakfast I think the servants thought us rather peculiar for we were

so pleased at having bathrooms that we ordered buckets and buckets of water and thoroughly enjoyed a good wash, so much so that one of the boys asked Tor if he wanted tea brought into the bathroom Breakfast was served without knives and forks, or even plates

We wanted to see what the town looked like in day-time, so out we went We found a clean bazaar, drains on both sides of the street and masses of fruit in the shops The main street led up to the most fascinating little fort and I had the feeling of looking at something taking place in a marionette theatre for I saw enormous men, handling dainty bunches of grapes walking up and down to the little fort. But the fort of course was not placed there just for the day's show but was firmly fixed there for ever The whole effect was enchanting

On our way back to the hotel we heard a splash in the water channel which passed through the hotel gardens and then we saw one of the guests enjoying a morning bath He sang lustily and happily but whether it was to keep warm or because he was happy was difficult to say I sat down on the hotel verandah in the shade of the vines while Tor went back to bed again It was a consoling reflection that if by any chance the bus did leave us stranded here, there would at least be plenty to eat

I was busy thinking of some of the lovely fruits I had seen, when five men from our bus came into the garden and sauntered up towards me I was very pleased to see them for I still had a sneaking feeling that the bus had gone I brought them right into Tor's room They asked us how we were and if we had slept well and one by one they all went over and felt the springs and mattresses and were most anxious to know if the hotel people had looked after us well They were so pleased when we said that the hotel was excellent and were apparently very proud of having a hotel like that in Afghanistan

After all that, I felt rather ashamed of myself for having accused them in my thoughts of being capable of leaving without us, for there they all were hoping fervently that we had a comfortable night although they themselves I am sure slept in the bus They told me too that they had been

a lot for it too, but they said they could not sell it as it would spoil the melody, for the bells played in sequence as the camels moved along and to take one of them would be like removing a note from the piano The last camel passed slowly by on its way The driver called us back to the bus again and I was left wondering whether the camels had only existed in my imagination, whether they had been ghost camels or real.

We drove more speedily now and the day-long fast was broken at a little village It was so well timed that it appeared as if the villages had been situated so that the fast could be broken with the minimum of delay I was always among the first to break the fast with a juicy melon which by now I had learnt to suck just as skilfully as any Afghan We went in search of tea and I noticed that our tea cups were given an extra wash in the drain which ran along the street and in which people were washing their faces and other parts of their anatomy I was glad I had the top of my thermos flask from which to drink my tea But tea, bread and grapes tasted as good as an expensive dinner at any first class hotel

The moon was full that night and we drove without lights. I believe in any case that the battery was almost finished, but I was able to have the thrill of driving in the desert by moonlight We were not disturbed at all by the speed of the bus for we could have walked beside it In fact when we came to a steep hill many of the roof passengers got down and walked up the hill. They took short cuts and always reached the top of the hill long before us. I enjoyed that moonlight drive

At about eight o'clock I saw something ahead which I could not quite make out, but when the bus stopped I got out and in front of me I saw a big river and realised that we had reached the Helmand river

The river was spanned by a bridge which looked gigantic in the moonlight. From what we could see of it, the bridge appeared to be very well constructed, but it was unfinished and apparently would remain so because of the war

We were told that we would have to ferry across the river but it was difficult to make out whether the intention was

that we should go across that night or some time the next day

There was supposed to be a good hotel somewhere on the far side where we could stay for the night We asked again when the bus would leave and were told it would leave some time about four o'clock the next afternoon which sounded highly probable after our experience of the day before Our little friend the mechanic offered to lead us across the bridge for in its unfinished state it was by no means safe By the help of my torch we managed to jump from one plank to another till we reached as far as the bridge had been built and there we found a ladder down which we had to climb into a boat The river was a fast flowing one and the ladder, which was shaky and home-made looking seemed to have been made for acrobats and not for ordinary people I left my suit case and two coats at the top of the ladder and asked the boy to carry them No sooner were we safely in the boat than I heard a shout and I knew that one of my coats had gone, all I could do was to sit and watch it in the moonlight going very fast down river It upset me a bit, as I had knitted it myself, but it might easily have been one of us instead Actually I think we would have reached Iran much more quickly that way, judging by the speed of the river current

CHAPTER VIII

GIRISHK HOTEL

Girishk was the name of the little town we came to In the moonlight we could see houses and trees on both sides of the road Our friend had handed us over to two other men to show us the way They both spoke English and told me that the hotel was only about ten minutes' walk from the bridge, but that can mean anything up to an hour in Afghanistan It took us half an hour to reach the hotel and when we arrived, there was not a soul to be seen. But we soon persuaded a man to go to the bazaar to fetch the hotel servants

diving into the river looking for my coat and that the boy who had lost it had asked them to tell me how sorry he was After this I really felt I loved them all

They sat round us and I drew a map of Europe to show them where Norway, our homeland, was but I might as well have pointed to the North Pole for it did not mean anything to them They admired us, they said, for our courage in travelling in their country as we did We got on so well that they stayed around us almost the whole afternoon and some of them had already decided to make themselves at home, for they were lying prone on the floor in our other room

For lunch we had the well-known Afghan "pulao" made, I think, with one of the cocks which had crowed all night It was served in a bowl with curds but I could not help thinking of the struggle they must have had to catch the cock. Before they caught him he must have been chased all round the compound for it seemed to me that his leg muscles were still stiff and contracted after the run I made my main course out of the fruit which followed the pulao The fruit was perfect

We were not surprised when they came and told us that the starting time of the bus had been put back one hour I asked for three teapots full of tea for I wanted to drink a lot before setting out on the most sandy part of the journey When the servant brought it there were no cups, no spoons and no sugar, but I am sure the Afghanis prefer to drink it direct out of the pot as it would be cleaner that way After consuming four glasses of tea and one of water I felt ready for the road The bill for the night and food came to about Rs 11 for both of us and the hotel proprietor seemed very pleased

We walked through the town to the bus which was waiting in the shade of some trees in a little park The hotel boy looked very surprised when we tipped him for carrying our baggage Tor had left his hat bag the previous night in the bus and was worried as there were many things in it he did not want to lose We asked them if they had seen

it and I am ashamed to say that there was a suspicion in my mind that perhaps it had been stolen, but here again the driver had taken extra care of it and handed it over to Tor with a broad smile

CHAPTER IX

GIRISHK—FARRAD

Outside the town the desert was much in evidence A hot dry breeze met us The mountains on both sides of the valley were pointed peaks The sand looked like waves and I had a feeling that the sea had suddenly dried up and that we were driving along the ocean bed As I was sitting now at the side of the bus I felt the movement of the roof much more and whenever I saw a hill or a curve coming I put on my hat to guard against possibilities The bus was like an old dhow* trying to battle her way to safety through heavy seas and I sat promising myself that I would be good ever after all my life if only I could reach Herat without getting that roof on my head

Now it was praying time again, but the driver did not stop The other people did not give in so easily and ordered him to stop I was rather sorry that the prayers did not last longer for the moon in the east had a lovely apricot hue and the sky was azure blue above the pointed mountains which rose out of the brown, wavy carpet of the desert. It made a perfect picture of colour and line—perfect for praying and meditation

I kept on turning round to get a glimpse of the moon and Tor did the same thereby upsetting the purdah ladies who now in the dark had removed their veils Every time Tor put his elbow up on the back of his seat, they gave me a push in the back and made a sign to indicate that I should tell him to face the front. I got rather annoyed eventually over the fuss they were making for I wondered if these

* Dhow = A native craft

women realised that travelling in this bus they really risked their lives This wretched bus was perhaps now making its last journey, loaded with baggage, thirty-five people inside, and ten on the roof I was sure they would have been only too pleased to get male help if the bus were to turn over and certainly would not mind being pulled out of the ruins even if their burqa came right over their heads

And yet an English doctor told me that once when he was called to examine a woman's throat he found her standing behind a curtain in the room and sticking out her tongue through a hole in the curtain At that moment I appreciated my freedom more than ever before and I felt sorry for the women who looked like lost souls in their violet, black and white burqas But they chatted and laughed and did not seem depressed in the least, and when they slept they slept soundly too and one of them was at that moment sitting breathing hard from inside her veil down Tor's neck and kept bumping up against his back If she had known it was a strange man's back she was bumping against she probably would have fainted on the spot

Her little twelve year old daughter, who had known freedom up to now, did not realise what was coming to her in a year's time when she would have to go into purdah but she was probably longing to copy her mother and become grown up Well, there is nothing like doing what your parents tell you, is there ? They are always right

I was too wide awake by now to be able to fall asleep and I was pleased when soon we came to a rest house The moon was full so we had a lovely view from the big terrace in front of the rest house Tables were laid out on the moonlit terrace , that sounds very romantic but usually when you look at the table cloth it is quite unwashed and you do not think there can be one iron in the whole country But here things were really clean.

There was a wash basin and out of the tap ran real clean water I could hardly believe my eyes when water continued to run , the flush worked too and the water disappeared without first floating all over the room. The sheets were clean and the beds also, where we could lie down to rest if we wished The tea set was clean and unbelievably

intact We enjoyed a good meal for we had brought Norwegian tinned sardines with us and good fresh tinned butter to put on the Afghan bread After that I lay down and tried to sleep but everything went round in my head The noise of the bus continued in my ears and as soon as I had settled down peacefully some one outside would shout so that I kept thinking the bus was going But by this time I did not care

We were surprised to find spring water here on a small hill right out in the desert I asked an English-speaking boy in the bus and he very proudly explained to me the ancient water system of Afghanistan

There are apparently miles of underground canals (called carez) They were cleverly constructed Here and there there are shafts down to the water so that they can check if the water is running Thus a caravan can always know where to find water

Here there was plenty of water so I thought there must be fruit as well. After a while I got up and went outside to enjoy the moonlight and beautiful view The old castle on the right echoed back the voice of the person calling to one of our passengers lost somewhere in the desert and we had to wait for him before we could set off He had fallen asleep on the ground nearby

Off we went again in the old scare-crow After studying the question of how to avoid bumps while sleeping at night I had a good idea I put my small pillow inside my topi put the topi against the door, somehow fixed my head inside and slept soundly I did not care if the driver fell asleep or not during the drive in the night

It was not until I awoke in a bed in a hotel after a good rest and looked out of my bedroom window that I realised that the country we had been driving through and the surroundings of Farrad looked lovely in the early morning sun Did some one say "Bahut Achha Hotel ?" (very good hotel ?) From the noise it sounded to me as if I was still in the bus with the added application of twelve wasps, fifty flies and ten sand flies

The remainder of what had once been blue silk curtains did something to remove the glare from the room but the

heat was unbelievable The opening into the next room had been blocked with wooden boards but you could easily have seen through had you been interested Tor could not stand either the heat or the flies in the room and went outside, but I cannot imagine that he was better off there for Farrad was undergoing a heat wave

I placed a net over my face and imagined myself in heaven with all the angels buzzing round me My illusion soon changed to one of being in the other place and the small sandflies were devils which even got through the net covering my face I wondered what I should do if I contracted sandfly fever now

This time the pulao was made with lamb but in this irritating heat it tasted pretty awful and we were pleased to go back to our grapes again which at least always tasted of grapes We were not sorry to leave this hotel for the bathroom was indescribable

The town, surrounded by mountains, turned out to be very attractive with green trees and the river running through it. The car assistant was very pleased to see us again especially as he wanted to call me "Memsahib" which was the only Hindustani word he knew and of course when he said "Jaldi, Memsahib," I rushed into the bus He was so amazed at the effect of his words that he laughed heartily

We picked up the purdah women further along the road My main thought was to get my old seat back again and not be forced to sit and make sure that Tor did not turn round and invade the women's privacy

Outside the town we came to a bridge which had looked all right while approaching it, but when we were on top of the bridge I realised we would not be able to get down to the other side unless we all dismounted which we did We went a good distance ahead in case the bus heeled over but really we would have been very sorry if our dear old bus had broken to pieces

There is another rule in Mohammadanism which is quite charming and that is that you need not observe Ramzan when you travel Some of them made use of that rule for they had their meals before sunset I came to the con-

clusion that the passengers of this bus were not so orthodox as those in the previous one for the latter had told me that *in no circumstances could they eat before the last golden* reflection of the sun had gone from the last floating cloud They watched that carefully too Or perhaps they watched each other

CHAPTER X

LAST STAGE TO HERAT

One of the women in purdah motioned to me to sit by the door again but I was determined to have room to stretch my *long legs this time and I asked her husband to explain to* her that I would change later on In my heart I felt sorry for her because it was a very hot day and it meant that she *would be unable to lift her veil and breathe in the fresh air* They were all so sweet to us so why should I be inconsiderate to her just because I wanted to be comfortable They never bought melons without giving one to me, the best one too They never wanted money for the tea they brought us and I felt I could live among these people and be happy all my life

The car assistant took a great interest in me and I think he thought I was a peculiar person. He would sit beside the driver and stare at me for hours Once when I had fallen *fast sleep I woke to find him sitting straight up against the* door, staring The end of my topi had fallen down over my face and I probably wore the funny expression which sleepers usually have The car assistant was delighted over my appearance and was grinning broadly when I awoke I became confused on finding him sitting staring at me so I moved over to Tor's seat for the bus had stopped and he had just gone out As I sat down there was a loud crack and I realised I had sat on my topi The assistant almost died with laughter and very soon I too saw the humour of the situation and we both doubled up with laughter Now that it had been established that I could enjoy a joke at my own expense he rushed out to tell the story to all the others.

On the road we halted beside a car which had broken down Every one got out to see if they could help Our driver, who had been driving all night worked on the car engine for about an hour until he had put it right—another instance of their honest friendliness We discovered later that quite a few of our roof passengers had gone on in the broken down car My first reaction was annoyance that they had not asked us to go in it for we would have reached Herat much earlier but later on I was pleased for we would have missed the next rest house with its Moghal garden We would have missed the fun of waking the servants and the fun of seeing what these bathrooms would be like Once again I turned on all the taps but nothing happened until I found a big tap in the corner and turned it on That started all the taps running at once like fountains and the bathroom and myself were pretty wet before I came out

The ladies in the bus and I became more friendly than ever after I had told them to put their legs up on the seat in front of them It made all the difference to their comfort A little girl had sore eyes which I had treated the night before with yellow ointment She was already much better so they had gained some confidence in me At one of the stops the same little girl came to me with a green leaf and it took me a long time to think what it was for Suddenly it struck me that I had seen the Kashmiris doing the same thing when they wanted medicine and I asked her in Urdu if she wanted medicine Her smile was like the rising sun and the little girl saw to it that she got a good amount of ointment out of me

We were drawing nearer and nearer to Herat and excitement was growing but still there was some very pretty country to go through and it was lovely driving amongst the pyramid shaped mountains On the way we met a large number of camel caravans At night or in the early morning we could see the men sitting round a fire and the saddlery laid nearby, while the younger boys looked after the camels grazing round them But how the creatures could eat those hard thorn bushes I could not understand But a camel's teeth are so long that it can chew cactus without the thorns sticking to its lips I happened to sit down

on a cactus bush when I intended to lie down for a rest as I thought, but even though I was wearing corduroy slacks I jumped about four feet in the air

What I loved seeing were the sheep dogs rounding up their sheep Once we came round a corner and there were sheep in the middle of the road The dog came and soon barked them all off the road He then hurried back and barked at us to show how annoyed he was that we had come on him too quickly to find him a little unprepared

The tribes had terrifying looking dogs which were a mixture of bull dog and wolf We were told that there is little left of a man whom they have attacked I also loved seeing the tribes women. They were as strong as horses and looked straight into your eyes Usually they carried a baby slung on their backs or it was seated in front of them on a camel or a donkey

The donkey caravans seemed more jolly than the serious camel ones for the donkeys were loaded on both sides with chickens or sometimes there was only one big hen or one cock perched on top of the donkey, the makings of a good pulao or, in the case of the cock, perhaps a cock fight

I could not help turning round once when I saw a donkey coming along with a boy and a big sheep seated on the top Of course the Karakul sheep of Afghanistan is something of a marvel But I pitied the poor donkey for I touched the "broad tail" of one of these sheep once and I sincerely regretted it The smell was worse than anything I had ever known

At last in the distance we saw Herat The road leading into it runs in a straight line for about six miles so the last part of our journey was particularly monotonous and I was pleased to learn later on that they no longer intend to go in for long, straight stretches of road

Tor and I sat and discussed how big the lakes were round about and also the size of the sea round Herat but as we drove along, the sea became smaller and smaller and at length I said I believed it was just a river The lakes amongst the mountains had changed too I knew all about mirages in the desert but this time I was certain it was

water Funnily enough there were no trees round about. Another thing I was amazed to see there were melons on the ground for the country looked so dry that I wondered how they could grow at all

But here again one finds the wonderful underground water system

Delicious fruit, tobacco and cotton are all cultivated in the Herat valley Silk is manufactured from raw silk obtained from silkworms

Herat, once the capital of an empire, is today a town with about 30,000 inhabitants

With or without a river, Herat looked fascinating with its mosque and lovely buildings There was no river outside Herat as we had first thought, but we had to cross a bridge built in the same style as the Chinese one we had crossed outside Farrad It was certainly not built to take motor *transport*

I was told later that the long straight road lacked one bridge to be a perfect road into Herat The bridge had been swept away by a flood and never replaced so that now we had to drive round the whole town over all sorts of bridges to get into the centre of the town

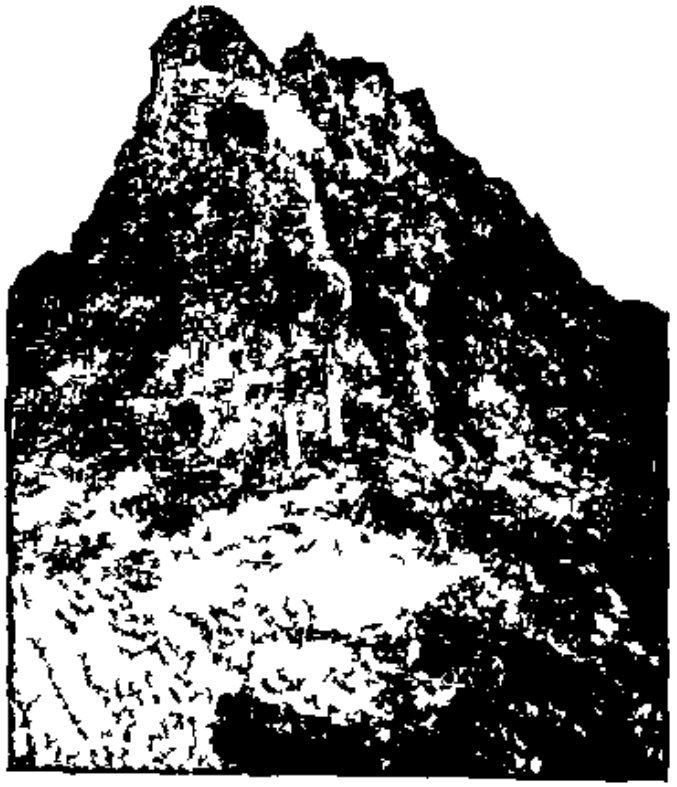
We were asked to show our passports once more and here again they insisted on keeping them, but this time all our friends in the bus took charge of our case and it was not long before our passports were given back again We knew from this that the people trusted us and we felt we were among real friends

CHAPTER XI

' HERAT

When we arrived at the market place every one was most helpful with advice and brought us tongas but they were a bit puzzled when we each set off in separate tongas Tor's horse was much faster than mine so he was soon far away

Afghan—Indian Border—*Photo by* S Jepson



Baber s Cave in Kandahar

GHAZNI FORT—AFGHANISTAN

villages where we could have melons and water to sustain us on such a journey

Meanwhile the European engineer was anxious to start out on the tour of Herat before the sun had set and said that his car waiting outside He suggested that the Persian and his family should follow us in their car

As a breeze blows in the early evening in Herat it was by this time pleasant and cool after the heat of the day

Outside the town we came to a Moghal Garden equipped with a modern swimming pool Here we stood and looked over Herat It lay in a valley which at this time of the year looked like a desert and yet Herat was very beautiful I spoke of the beauty of the place, and the Persian said "I like the place but my wife does not"

"Small wonder," remarked the engineer, "the place is dead, for all the women are in purdah When we go to a sports meeting here at our glorious new Stadium, it is very dull without our women to inspire the men and give the place gaiety and colour It is like a bull fight in Spain with no women present"

We returned to the hotel to an excellent dinner The Governor had specially asked the hotel to look after us well and they certainly did The menu consisted of meat cakes, two or three kinds of palao, vegetables of all sorts delicious tomatoes, grapes and melons Later we lingered in the enjoyment of comfortable beds as long as we could for we never knew when we would be able to do that again

Our friend had arranged to take us to see some of the mosques He had friends among the priests and he spoke their language and I believe we were highly honoured He told me, however, to put on stockings I understood what he meant and put on a woollen suit high necked blouse, stockings and gloves, hat and veil I laughed when I saw myself in my bedroom mirror I looked like a tourist in India of thirty years ago

First of all we went to an old ruined mosque which contained some excellent mosaic work He introduced us to an aged Persian whose family had been mosaic workers for generations He and his son had taken up the old

craft again and had been given the job of redecorating this ruined mosque We were pleased that they were keeping this old art alive and resisting the encroachment of cheap factory-made work.

When we came to the mosque our friend became very serious and I pulled my veil tight round my face "A year and a half ago," he whispered, "nobody was allowed to enter the mosque" We went round the corner of a big wall into a garden with huge old trees and a pond in the centre The entrance to the mosque faced this garden and many of the priests were sitting on the steps leading up to the entrance Some of them were old and toothless, with long grey beards, some enormous and fierce looking

The engineer soon found friends among them and he greeted them in their own language and they signified that we could pass in Our friend walked up to the shrine in the middle of the garden in the gentle way which the Chinese have He put out his hand and said "Behold the beauty," and turned round to watch our faces

The work in the shrine was like the most delicate Belgian lace carved in marble We went from one tomb to another in an ascending scale of beauty and came at last to the most beautiful of all My friend knew this tomb well He fussed round it and showed us how it had all been carved out of one piece of black marble and how natural the carved leaves on it looked The work was so delicate that it looked as if it had been made from silk threads rather than stone but in some way I was dissatisfied for there seemed to be a pre occupation with detail rather than a desire to achieve significant form It was craftsmanship rather than art

We stood for a long time gazing at the tomb and at length the engineer said "Why are we so afraid that we shall be forgotten? Why did this man make himself this wonderful tomb?" I could not help smiling when I saw in the corner another tomb plain white and inconspicuously placed on one side to make room for the magnificient black marble one which was bursting with splendour Vanity was surely the motive behind the black marble one I could almost see the man, full of pride and pomp allowing with some condescension a tomb to be carved for his wife and allow-

ing it to be placed in the same room as his tomb, for his wife's tomb was the plain white one It was not his fault that the white one was much more artistic, for I imagined that the plastic quality of the white one had been achieved by leaving the design to an artist The result was a tomb of pure, lovely lines I feel sure that the woman had been in life much more aware of beauty than her vain husband

As I passed the Mullas on the steps I wondered if, by sitting meditating in this old mosque with its beautiful old stone carvings, they got more out of life than other people Some of the Mullas looked very grave and had a serious air about them Others looked gentle and kind and settled Were they really getting more out of life than we who walked out in the sunshine and breathed the fresh air? I felt like throwing off my veil to show that I could face the sun

CHAPTER XII

AN ENGINEER'S TROUBLES

In the evening we went for a long walk and our engineer friend told us how difficult it sometimes was to work in a neutral country which had potential enemies on her borders He told us how one night a party had been given A group of three men sat drinking He was one of them and they were drawn together by having the same profession but they never dared mention their countries of origin and had learned to be very careful about how much they drank

It appeared that it was difficult to get good drinks for our friend said "There was a bottle of pure spirit standing on a table One of the men thought it was water and being very thirsty poured out a glassful of it and before anyone could stop him, had emptied the whole glass That evening the subject of war had been touched on Everybody had felt a little embarrassed and now there was an impression that the man who had drunk the full glass had been tricked

into doing it An atmosphere of mistrust grew and, because of that, a man of another nationality poured himself out a similar glass from the same bottle and emptied it in one gulp, as the first man had done"

Our friend said he just sat and waited to see what would happen next for the atmosphere of mistrust grew rapidly "I was terrified what the reaction of the whole thing would be," he said, "and I was also frightened that the Afghans should see them I was sure they would run out and create merry hell and cause a scandal

"Being of rather slight build and no longer young, I did not like the look of the whole situation and I wondered if I should 'phone for a doctor I hesitated over doing so, however, for not only were they now both soundly asleep, so that the immediate danger had passed but I did not quite know which nationality of doctor to summon I was suddenly acutely conscious of the intolerable situations which can arise in wartime The strain of being a stranger in a foreign country, with my family in trouble at home and two dead-drunk bodies asleep on the floor, was certainly more than I could bear alone

"One of the drunken men was of the same nationality as myself so I decided, in order to even things up, that I would 'phone for the doctor of the same nationality as the other man"

He went on to tell us how he waited downstairs until the doctor arrived so that he could tell him what had happened The doctor went upstairs while our friend went out for a walk, greatly relieved to have passed the responsibility on to someone else He could remember passing the doctor's car and thinking what a sickly yellow colour it had

He said after that he walked like a mad-man along the road and thought of his suffering people in Europe and of how his son and daughter had become slaves of the Nazi regime Knowing they both had his temperament they would have a bad time in an occupied country He thought about his wife whom he had not seen for many years and wondered if she was starving in her advancing years He

walked and walked, for how long he did not know Then he suddenly wondered if he had done the right thing to come out of the room, away from it all. He rushed back and arrived just in time to see the dreadful yellow car disappearing The colour worked on him like jaundice

The following morning he had a telephone call and a voice told him that the men were all right but one of them had a big wound on his head and that it looked as if there had been a fight "I recollected," he said, "that one of the men had fallen off his chair on to the floor and that there had been a bang on the table just as he fell, but there was no point in trying to explain all this, so the atmosphere did not improve amongst us after this"

We sat watching the sun setting over the desert "Watch," he said, "when the last tip of the sun goes under the horizon and leaves a tiny little blue light behind, you can wish and your wish will come true" Of course both of us saw that blue light that day and of course we both wished and wished hard I thought how this man must have sat there for three years wishing and wishing the same thing and yet he probably still believed that his wish would come true Whether tomorrow or in ten years time did not seem to worry him at all No wonder he asked me later "Why do you think we live on this earth?" All I could think of in reply was to say "To learn and to be conscious of our own being"

He said he would feel very lonely when we left "I am so afraid," he said, "that I shall die without seeing my people but then again there are times when I feel I am one with humanity, one with the whole universe, and then I am so happy I have a firm conviction of immortality."

I thought how funny it is that some people who long for loneliness and the meditative life cannot escape from the claims of every day existence while others, like this man who was surrounded by the real meditative background of calm and beautiful surroundings and who was friendly with the philosophers of the country, would not find peace until he had returned to the hurly-burly of life and people again.

We were sorry to leave Herat, our friends and the nice hotel The lorry had been ordered by the Director of Roads and arrived at the hotel at about eight o'clock in the evening The front seat was comfortable and roomy so I managed to manoeuvre myself into a lying position with the help of a few cushions here and there and I quickly fell asleep Tor, on the other hand, had much more room but had to sit straight up against the side of the lorry He was rather pleased when we had a puncture for he could get out and stretch his legs It was a very cold night with a bitter wind blowing and I felt sorry for the man who had to repair the tyre by the light of my torch while I could stretch myself at full length wrapped up in a camel-hair coat and blanket

We arrived at Islamkala early next morning If there is a place God has forgotten I think this must be it Nevertheless the people were very nice and looked after us well When we arrived at the border we were anxious to know what would happen next and if there was any connection at all at the border station There were a number of camels in a courtyard and I felt certain this would be our next form of transport

Our Director of Roads had apparently instructed his driver to do his best for us We were shown into a waiting-room and the Customs people came and had a look at us and at our passes several times After a great deal of arguing amongst themselves they told us we could get on to a lorry, and with relief we realised that we were safe for another part of the journey

Once again, crossing a border gave me a certain thrill, but here I looked hard to find something to make it exciting but there was nothing . It was just desert and no rhythm in the desert either It was the deadest desert I have even seen The only thing I remember which marked the occasion was the driver's remark when we passed a telephone pole lying on the ground "Now we know we are in Iran" It was a remark similar to the one the Indian driver had made crossing the border in the Khyber Pass We all blame each other!

CHAPTER XIII

INTO IRAN

At twelve o'clock we arrived at Karez and it was a relief to see women out of purdah We were asked to rest in the drawing-room of the house belonging to the Customs officer and his family The room was furnished in bad taste but it was very clean We had our own food, but were served tea in two cups as small as liqueur glasses It was worse than nothing for we were parched, but as it was served with an engaging smile from an unveiled woman we were so charmed that we dared not ask for more After that we lay down flat on the carpet and slept soundly for two hours

In the afternoon our hosts served tea, again out of the small cups Tor said he did not want any and she seemed very pleased to be able to drink it herself with me When she removed the tray she left the sugar behind and smiled to me in a very understanding way but she was very surprised when I refused to accept the great favour she had shown Sugar was apparently scarce in that part of the world

The hostess had three daughters and a sister staying with her, so we had a grand time while waiting for the bus They were very interested in fashions so I showed them my frocks and also some photographs of Kashmir They could hardly believe they were photographs of real places for they had never seen mountains before They were very interested in my children of whom I showed them a photograph and we had a great discussion over their clothes

We did not understand what we said to each other so I had to explain myself by the help of drawings When I pulled a face at my passport photograph, they cackled like geese They were sorry when the time came for us to leave and the youngest little girl kept holding on to my skirt to keep me back I thanked God that I had not been born in and did not have to live all my life in a town like that

I asked Tor to enquire once more when the lorry for Meshed would leave He came back immediately and said it was leaving in a minute and we rushed away from the happy family, who incidentally refused to accept anything for their hospitality I sat down and made myself as comfortable as possible again in the corner of the front seat By this time I had worked out quite a good technique for placing my cushions and blanket The lorry was surrounded by beggars who looked very poor and ragged after the proud Afghans Here the beggars seemed to be a mixture of Russian and Iranian. I noticed a particularly sweet girl who was just an onlooker She wore a black shirt, black trousers and a scarf round her neck. She had lovely blue Mongolian eyes and a turned up nose

The beggars were driven away by the police and one obstinate beggar was soundly smacked over the face and he cried like a child Our driver turned up, unshaven and wearing a big cap, but he spoke English which was a great blessing He looked very wide awake and not in the least Oriental He said he had been to Russia and I think there was considerable uncertainty as to his antecedents

As we drove once more out into the desert I saw two tribesmen galloping off up a side road on two magnificient horses The horses around Herat and Meshed and further north are supposed to be among the best in the world I enjoyed seeing how well they carried their heads and how confidently seated were the men in the saddle

I awoke from my day-dream to hear the driver say in a dark Russian voice "I am very afraid very afraid, there are many bandits on this road" He always said everything twice 'Do you know bandits plenty here I have got money" he went on "have you got money ?' he asked We said "No, very little' He asked if we had a gun. We said "No" again "Very bad' he said 'Very bad" "They come in the night"

By this time I had pictured the whole thing in my mind We would be stopped by at least six bandits armed with rifles and be robbed of all our luggage I regretted I had brought a fur amongst other things Later on when we

stopped for tea I put my ring in my shoe and we put whatever money we had in a pillow case.

On reflection we thought it was rather strange that he had asked us if we had money for he could easily have arranged the robbery himself if he considered it worthwhile That was my first reaction because he looked a bit of a rascal to me We came to a village where he went inside the walls and stayed for about an hour I felt certain that he had gone to arrange an attack for the night It did not make matters much better when Tor said "Of course this is the worst part of the trip"

Every time I awoke in the night I felt the ring in my shoe and was reminded about the bandits I dreamt very vividly about giving them my wrist watch so that they should not go for my ring, which was of more value

Suddenly I awoke and realised we were standing still I hardly dared to peep out of my blanket The door was open Tor and the driver had disappeared and the cold desert wind blew right in on me In front of us stood a huge loaded lorry Through some trees I could see an old dilapidated looking house and on a bench outside it, underneath a red blanket, lay a man snoring He looked exactly like one of the Seven Dwarfs in "Snowwhite" I wondered where the bandits could be and also where Tor and the driver had gone to In and out from the rest house walked sleepy soldiers, stretching and yawning Out of the big lorry in front of us came a man wearing a dreadful yellow sheepskin coat and it all looked a bit mysterious in the early dawn I sat still, waiting underneath my blanket

Then I noticed particularly two of the soldiers who came out from the house I did not realise it that moment, that for the first time I was looking at Russian soldiers—fair, strong looking men—so no wonder I was surprised when they carried rifles and fixed bayonets They distributed ammunition and loaded their rifles I crept still further down into my hiding place

They walked hurriedly behind the lorry I was in, and all the others looked in their direction I waited tensed for a shot to ring out, but fortunately it was all imagination for

shortly after Tor came back from a walk in the desert and the driver came stretching himself, still sleepy, from the rest house Some camels passed and it looked as if they were loaded with big pieces of marble but I looked again more closely and realised they were blocks of salt

We drove on again through some desert country The only fertile parts were the melon fields The small huts where the farmers lived were very strange in shape, some looked like a good design for a hat box while others looked as if they would be useful in covering up an old smelly cheese

We arrived at a walled village which, from the inside, looked comparatively modern The driver wanted to stay here for six hours but as we wanted to reach Meshed that day, he had arranged for another driver We were sorry to change our driver for we had learned to like him a good deal. He was of Russian parentage and had quick intelligence and he rose in our estimation when he would not accept anything extra for the trip It was strange to think that we had mistrusted him

I got a shock when I saw the next driver for he turned out to be the man in the dreadful yellow sheep-skin coat. He looked really a nasty type and I never forgave him for making me sit on that yellow dirty coat of his I think it must have been made from a very old ram, because the smell was unbearable

CHAPTER XIV

MESHED AND THE RUSSIANS

Meshed looked, as we approached it as if it was surrounded by water but as usual the water disappeared as we drew nearer Someone told me the country outside Meshed was full of blossom in spring This time being late autumn, it looked brown and barren The town lies in an open valley bounded to the northeast by a range of mountains

ten thousand feet in height The town itself stands at a height of about three thousand feet The two domes with the four minarets looked impressive in the glittering sun inside the high mud walls that surrounded the whole town Before going inside our papers were very closely examined by strongly armed Russians and I disliked the way they stuck tommy guns right up into my face

We arrived safely at the market place but here the driver asked an extortionate price for the small journey we had done with him We refused to pay and said that we would talk to him in the hotel, hoping to find some one who could reason with him We took another car and managed to get hold of a man who said he would show us the hotel But when we arrived we did not believe there was any hotel at all

We passed through a gate into a courtyard which had a garden with a pond in it A verandah ran round the entire first floor of the building and was quickly filled with interested onlookers They popped out of their rooms wearing dressing gowns, pyjamas, or whatever they had on at the moment A great discussion ensued of which we did not understand a word, but we could tell that it was all about us and a room In the middle of this discussion we learned that there was another hotel somewhere in the town, so being convinced that it could not be worse than this one, we went off to find it

The man who had accompanied us from the lorry became anxious about his money so he started a terrible argument which in turn affected the taxi driver When we arrived at the hotel every one was arguing very loudly and we could not have made a very dignified impression Had we known the people of Persia better we would have known that this was quite usual The hotel was most peculiar and the front looked like the entrance to a motor car shop They had a room, they said, but no furniture and I asked if I could see it On my way upstairs I met a man who understood English and he volunteered to help Eventually we were told we could have a furnished room if we waited for four hours

The English speaking man was, I thought, a Turk. He said that he lived at the first hotel we had been to, which he maintained, was much better than this one and he wanted us to go back and try again Back we went, but of course they were rather hurt by this time that we had gone away, so our chances seemed nil. People on the verandah still stood discussing us

The driver of the lorry had joined us by this time and kept following us around closely, telling the whole world meanwhile exactly what he thought of us We asked our new friend what we should pay for the trip and he said that the driver's price seemed reasonable Later on when we got to know the proper value of the currency it turned out to be not too bad at all

Eventually we got a room and sat down thankfully and had tea with the Turk What his job was goodness knows When we talked about roads, he was an engineer, if there was a worthwhile business in the neighbourhood he seemed to run it Later on, we met him again in Teheran and he told me that he had designed one of the big buildings there I said I did not like the windows he had designed in the building He answered "Well it is difficult I designed modern square windows for that building but the contractors who were building it did not like the windows so they just made high French ones That is typical of this country"

He enjoyed frightening me by telling me not to put on my best clothes when I walked about in the streets of Meshed "They will shoot you for a pair of good shoes here" When I stood on the verandah of the hotel and saw some prisoners shackled together being led along by armed soldiers I thought perhaps his remarks might have some point

I went into the bath room and turned on the water and let it run for half an hour to remove some of the smell before I went in for a wash

The Consul had asked us to stay with him but as we were so grimy we thought it unfair to go into a private home Actually I came to like Meshed for it is amazing

how much difference the people can make to a place After we had been to lunch with the British Consul and his wife they pressed us to stay on, but we had decided, acting on the advice of our friend, to leave Meshed as early as possible and we had already made arrangements for this

When we were arranging the next part of our journey with the British lorry firm, they served us tea in the office and told us that it was not much fun to live in Meshed since the Russians had occupied it Even the members of the firm had to have passes to go outside the town Drivers who had driven all through Persia with goods were changed in Meshed before going further north towards the Turkestan border

We were also told that if the Russians came to official parties there were always about three of them They talked little and stood together—one could never persuade them to go to private parties

When we had arranged with the lorry people they offered to take us round the town by car In particular they wanted us to see the world famous mosque It looked gorgeous with its two domes, one covered with gold which could be seen from a long distance in the glittering sun The other dome was of deep blue coloured mosaic and the two together presented an imposing sight

Thousands of pilgrims visit the shrine every year Many of them have to walk to reach Meshed, which is the third most important place for pilgrimage after Mecca The shrine is built over the remains of Iman Riza, a descendant of the Prophet The gates leading into the courtyard were of rich eastern design, done in coloured mosaic, but from a distance all looked a mass of very strong turquoise blue

I am told the walls inside the shrine are studded with precious stones When the kings in olden times were afraid of their loot being stolen, the holy mosque was of course the safest place to keep the treasure A double purpose was served The rich donations to the shrine brought spiritual solace to the conqueror and it kept the treasures in the country But what a pity, that such wonderful

collections should remain unpolished, uncut, and also unseen except by a few

How I wished I could get inside! I heard about a European lady who, dressed up in purdah, walked in with a Mohammadan friend to have a look at the jewellery "Walk right beside me," he said, "otherwise you will get lost in the crowd, and do exactly as I do If I kneel down, do so" This was several years ago If she had been discovered there would have been unlimited trouble

Next we went to a place where turquoise was polished The stones are found in the mountains round Subzewvar and are of very high quality with a dark blue colour I asked our friend if the story was true about the man who had such a valuable blue turquoise that he dared not leave it lying about in his shop for fear of its being stolen He locked it up in a cupboard for some months, but when he took it out to sell it, its lustre had gone because of lack of air and light, and it had changed from lovely blue to a green colour "That is quite true," he answered "We reckon a stone is worthless when it becomes green and it should be worn as much as possible in order to retain its lustre"

CHAPTER XV

NISHAPUR AND OMAR KHAYYAM

The lorry was supposed to come for us about two o'clock but did not turn up until about 4-30 It was a big American truck The front seat was only made for two and it was not so pleasant to have three people in it But to sit in the back of the empty lorry would have almost killed anyone, as we found out when we set off We had become used to the speed of Afghanistan driving about ten miles an hour This was nearer fifty I hardly had time to collect myself before we were outside the town and I had to look round quickly if I wanted to have a last glance at the lovely golden dome of the mosque

Outside the town the road improved, but I could hardly believe that the driver intended to keep up this terrific pace, driving an empty eight ton lorry. My liver and kidneys had a good shaking. Then he pulled up with a jerk and came to a dead stop outside a tea house. The tea house looked very dirty and we preferred to sit outside. The tea was undrinkable and served in very dirty cups. A mad looking boy served sugar from an old rusty tin and he selected sugar lumps carefully one by one with his fingers. A cow came and went inside the house by a side door. The calf was accorded a special honour and was allowed into the cafe itself. I was glad to be away.

We reached Nishapur in the evening. Here is the mausoleum of the world famous Persian poet Omar Khayyam. He was born in Nishapur in the eleventh century but he was introduced to Europe nearly seven hundred years later when Fitzgerald translated his poems into English. Very few Persians recognise Khayyam as a poet of any high merit.

He was known as an astronomer and to him goes the credit of having revised the Persian calendar. I wonder if he was responsible for the strange way in which the Persians record their time at present. Their day starts as from sunset and not from midnight to midnight. This method is rather confusing. For instance, what we call Sunday evening would be Monday evening with the Persians and many funny situations result when any engagements are made with them.

Just as most of our engagements are subject to the clause "weather permitting," the Persians have "insha allah" attached to all their promises or ordinary talks about the future. "Insha Allah" means "God willing." Similarly when they have to refer to something of the past they supplement their saying with "Masha Allah" which means "By God's grace."

We drove so quickly that I barely had time to enjoy the blue mist as the sun set behind the golden brown mountains. The country here was well irrigated by canals which ran down towards the villages. Suddenly we stopped again,

this time at a very small tea shop in which lived two friends of our driver.

As we again were tearing along in the night at a break-neck speed, we were suddenly stopped by a flashlight signal Two well armed Russian sentries appeared, one pointing a tommygun at us while the other cross-examined our driver, who, by the way, spoke Russian fluently The soldiers were apparently not satisfied with his explanation as to our identity, because he made us get down from the huge lorry and stand in the beam of the strong head lights

Despite our special Russian road travel permit, we were thoroughly cross-examined and our replies were taken down word by word These stern Russian soldiers left nothing to chance Eventually they became reassured as to our bona-fides, accepted a cigarette and wished us good night

I now saw the driver's point in going so fast He drove madly to finish with the monotony of those miles of long, boring roads and to have a longer time at every tea shop or village He must have been quite a lad in his way, this driver, for all the girls received him with great enthusiasm.

At one o'clock in the morning we arrived at a village with a very pleasant little Bulgarian cafe It was beautifully clean. Two women—mother and daughter—served the most lovely beef stroganof and the father served wine The driver said he would stop for twenty minutes, but as we had already experienced his interpretation of twenty minutes we did not wait in the car for a moment but went out to try and have a sleep

After some time I heard a violin playing polkas and someone clapping in rhythm. I went over to the window and peeped in The son of the house was playing the violin and the father and the driver were clapping their hands in rhythm and singing At two o'clock the driver came out to the lorry, followed by the other members of the household The son was still playing the violin.

We had another mad drive through the dark night, but after half an hour the driver stopped again at a house This time he said he wanted to sleep and we took him seriously

for he went inside the house, taking his big coat with him I climbed up on top of the lorry, rolled out my bedding and went to sleep under four blankets

In the morning I learned that it had been below freezing point that night No wonder I thought it was a bit chilly, but the air was lovely and dry The stars and the moon did not keep me awake long As I still wore my shoes, I did not put my feet inside the bedding with the result that I awoke to find them as cold as ice I was just awake enough to have the sense to put my hands under the blankets for they were very cold, even with gloves on So I forgot about my feet again

The driver awakened us in the morning I say 'us' because the car assistant was asleep underneath a sheepskin coat in a corner of the roof He must have come up during the night for I never saw him there when I climbed up to go to sleep The sun was up and shining, but when I got on to my feet I fell again for they were quite numb with cold

Standing on top of the high bus I could see right over a wall into the funniest little village It was an ants' hill enlarged a thousand times, only in this case the ants had used mud mixed with water to build their small compartments inside the wall I could not help being reminded of the small ants again when we were stopped on the way by some small boys who held up big melons for us to buy As soon as we stopped the small boys ran into a mud hut built underneath the ground and brought us up ice-cold melons They tasted delicious and were most refreshing in the dry, dusty climate

The sandy brown mountains looked lovely in the morning light which infused them with varying shades of green and turquoise Some were very high and suddenly it dawned on me why the people had adopted beehive shaped buildings The mountains were terraced upwards in the same shapes each beehive a bit above the other

We passed tea place after tea place and the driver popped in and out at each one and made witty remarks while having a quick cup of tea I never saw him paying for his tea and

he appeared to pay with his good humour He seemed to be liked by both old and young

At one tea place he asked us to sit down and have tea with his friend while he carried out a little repair job We were seated in a kind of office and after I had finished my tea I sat watching the Russian soldier walking up and down outside He was Turkoman and was wearing big Cossack boots Then I looked at some pictures on the wall There was a photo of Stalin in his long overcoat and beside it was a photo of a plane and another which I could not understand from where I sat. It looked interesting so I walked across the room and had a close look. It was a photograph of some Russian pilots dancing to a balalcka in front of their plane It was a charming photo

I suppose I looked for quite a while for they were such a gay, happy lot to look at, and I thought of how Russian dancing and music were among the best in the world Eventually I went back to my seat again I had hardly sat down before the Russian soldier came in and looked at me Then he too walked over to the two pictures to see what it was which had attracted me so much He stood looking for a long time, and then walked out It was a good thing I had looked at the right kind of picture I had an uncomfortable feeling, reflecting what living in a country must be like where every action is closely watched

By now I had begun to enjoy the fast speed at which we were driving and liked the way in which the driver made the best out of every small stop we had At mid-day we arrived at a village where the bazaar shops were filled with fruit Once again we had a collection of curious children round us who were very pleased when we gave them fruit Four small boys sat round half a melon and dipped their fingers into it, eating only the seeds Unlike Europeans, they ate nothing of the solid part of the melon

There was one little sensitive looking boy who was not so shy as the others, or perhaps his longing for something novel was stronger than the others He followed me wherever I went, while the other little boys sat in a corner and ran every time I looked at them

He was pleased when I took out a pencil and drew a cat on a piece of paper for him I also drew a picture of his friend who wore a national costume They did not seem to be very impressed with the drawings, but when I drew a lorry, they both cried with delight and asked for another drawing I had struck the right thing, for now all the other shy boys came too and all wanted lorries I drew as quickly as I could lorry after lorry and they snatched them out of my hands even before they were finished

Luckily I had sufficient paper but my lorries had to become smaller and smaller to economise in paper A little girl came and held up her hand for one By now the boys had a fight every time a drawing was ready So I made sure the little girl got hers by placing it right into her hands The little girl's mother came up and she and the little girl went away with the piece of paper as if they had been given some contract and had to hurry up in case it would not be implemented The boys looked at the little girl as if to say that it was hardly fair that she had been given an advantage because of her sex

I was scared to death when one drawing fell underneath the lorry and the boys tried to get it The lorry assistant had to climb down and remove the boys forcibly, for by that time there were about ten lying underneath the wheels

We stayed at this little village for four hours so I had time to study each little boy Even with the same education I could see how they would all grow up differently, developing separate characteristics which were already apparent in them. Two of them had clever, intelligent faces while one or two looked as if they would turn out rascals. It must be a difficult task to be a schoolmaster in Persia

At the cross roads into Sharud we were stopped to have our permits examined Here again there were Russian soldiers armed to the teeth, watching the cross roads and stopping every car and lorry The drivers' passes too, were examined There was another lorry at the cross-roads and a rather attractive looking officer stood talking to the driver of this lorry We thought he looked as if he would be able to speak English so Tor spoke to him

He turned out to be a Russian and what little English he spoke he had learnt in the last war But really he spoke it so badly that it could hardly be called English at all.

A lot of remarks were made about our red coloured passes and they wondered what nationality we were We told them that we were Norwegians, but never expected them to know where Norway was Then to our surprise the Russian officer drew a circle on the road and pointing to the North and South Poles said "Nansen" and "Amunsden" This officer was the only Russian we came across who spoke to people other than of his own nationality

CHAPTER XVI

END OF THE ROAD

Not far from Sharud we went through an attractive pass which reminded me of the Khyber Pass, but if I had known at the time that a bus had been attacked at this very spot on the previous day, perhaps I might not have enjoyed the pass so much The story was that six tribesmen, with one rifle among them, stopped the bus and thoroughly looted it, extracting about a thousand tomans* from the poor people who were travelling Another car came up just as they had finished looting, but the tribesmen managed to escape

Although there was a watch tower at the summit of the pass which gave a good all-round view, it was a good place for a hold up, for the dacoits could easily make a quick get-away among the hills From the top of the pass, we could see Sharud not far away nestling in the valley surrounded by mountains

Sharud meant the end of our journey by lorry From there we would proceed by train and you can imagine how pleased I was to catch sight of the little town The driver, of course, told us that if we wished we could go on to

* Toman, a Persian silver coin worth about one rupee

Teheran by lorry, but I would have been shaken to pieces had we done that

Our permits were examined again outside town and we were driven right up to a hotel Our expectations in this direction were not high after our previous experience so we did not question where we were told to go, which was through a wine shop, down some steps, and into a garden where a group of people stood talking

As far as we could make out, once again there was no room We talked and talked, but no one could understand us At last a young boy came along who could speak English and he told us there was only one room available, but it contained three men at present We told him we could sleep in the garden if necessary but then he said "It is very lucky for you because my friend and I will give you our room and move into the other room with the three men" I agreed with him that it was very lucky and I also thanked him very much for his offer and told him how kind he was He was so delighted to be able to do us a favour that I started liking the Persians from that moment

The young boy and his friend moved out immediately and we moved into the vacated room which had the only bathroom in the hotel and the only wash basin But you can imagine what it was like when all the guests brushed their teeth and washed themselves immediately outside our door which, incidentally, would not close properly I put all my suit cases in front of the door before we went to sleep that night

It was still early in the evening and we went for a walk in the town which had attractive broad streets with water-channels on both sides Everybody stared at us and it was unpleasant when nobody could understand us when we talked to them I suppose the Persians thought we too were Russian, for the Russians occupied a whole street of houses We were just on the point of turning back when, approaching us up the street, came two young men—one I guessed to be a Turk and the other could be nothing other than an Englishman

They came up to us and it turned out that they were employees of the company in whose lorry we had travelled.

It was good to talk with some one who understood us for a change They pressed us to come and stay at their bungalow, but after all the trouble we had had in getting a room we did not like to hurt the feelings of the two young men who had moved out of their room for our sake

They were on their way to the telegraph office and asked if I would like to go with them to see a little more of the town I accompanied them while Tor said he would be happier near the hotel for he had eaten too many melons lately We had to wait for about two hours to contact the nearest town by telegraph The man who was supposed to be operating the telegraph service kept going out first of all for a meal and then for a smoke I realised that patience was more necessary than ever before So the three of us sat down content to wait, and began to talk about other things

I told them about the terrific pace at which their lorry had been driven and I said that I thought their lorries would not last many years They both laughed "Years!" they said. "We put them into the workshop for repairs after a month on the road The drivers are well paid for they are scarce and they do exactly as they like on these long roads It is quite impossible to control them, but if they have an accident they are put in prison for six months" They told me that tyres in Persia cost five thousand tomans each and one could easily understand what a temptation this was for the drivers. Apparently sometimes a whole lorry disappeared and no trace was ever found

On the following day we had lunch with the Englishman and the Turk at their bungalow They had a woman to cook for them, but it did not seem to make the food much better than the normal fare served up to us in Persia The fruit was lovely, as usual.

The fact that from now on we would make our journey by train did not mean that we had left our troubles behind for we immediately met the problem of how to get a ticket and a seat on the train Unless we happened to be personal friends of the station master it seemed almost impossible. We were told that we might be able to get a seat for the

following day, but we would have to pay twice the normal fare

We decided to chance waiting until the following day and returned to the hotel

Quite a number of people intended to sleep in the hotel garden and as I lay in my bed in the stuffy room I envied them the fresh air and the clear moon lit sky I fell asleep thinking of all the people who would come in the morning to disturb me by their morning wash, but I could have spared myself that worry for they never appeared Whether it was that they did not wash at all in the morning or if it was that we were early risers, I do not know

The Turk came in the morning with a lorry to take us to the station and to help us with the difficult process of obtaining tickets Somehow he looked as if he was very proud of being able to drive such a big lorry so I asked him if it was more difficult than an ordinary car He had asked the driver to sit behind and said he had intended to drive The driver looked a bit surprised and I saw his face change, but he went behind without a word

We went on talking as we drove along, the road was flat except for a little incline down towards the station We were going at a good speed, to show off I think, and as we went down hill towards the station the Turk put on the foot brake but it did not work. He then bent forward to put on the hand-brake, but that did not work either He then naturally turned round to curse the driver for the state of the brakes and by this time it was too late even to change down into a lower gear We were very near the station buildings by this time where there was little room to manoeuvre and the only thing he could do was to steer right into some bales of cotton lying on the road We went right into them with a terrific bang and they acted as a spring buffer We were lucky The big lorry just seemed to shake off something unpleasant and that was all. I enjoyed the exchange of looks between the driver and the Turk. He did not say a word to the driver, which rather astonished me, but it certainly demonstrated once again the strong position of the drivers

I was asked to stand and watch the luggage as already there was around us a collection of boys, whom, from their looks at least, one could hardly trust One of them impressed me He was a cripple with no legs but somehow he had managed on his own to climb on to our lorry when we started and had come down with us to the station. He was first out of the lorry again and appeared right in the centre of the other boys. But his habit of pushing himself forward was, I think, a part of his technique as a cripple so that people should not forget him He had a very intelligent face and I was told he made a lot of money.

I was sorry to miss the argument which must have taken place over the tickets, but any way the most important thing is that we got them.

CHAPTER XVII

TEHERAN TRAIN

Eventually the train arrived and we all rushed on to the platform to get a seat—we were lucky to get two window seats. The boy from the hotel sat down in the compartment with us so as to prevent people from filling up the compartment—but the contrary happened for every one seemed to come and talk to him and in no time the compartment was overflowing

A young mother entered, accompanied by her five year-old son and carrying a baby in her arms The boy was ill and when I tried to make him smile he only looked at me with hungry eyes and seemed to blame me for having taken the best place in the compartment We found out that he had dysentery and was going to Teheran to be cured Tor, who was sitting next to this family, was suddenly surrounded by the most intimate baby clothes which were hung up anywhere to be dried Whether they were washed or not did not matter, and I shall never forget his face when a white nappie was placed on a table right beside the grapes he was just about to eat.

Later on the mother tried to fasten the nappie outside the window so that it would dry in the breeze made by the moving train The baby's trousers were hung up right above Tor's head and fell down every few minutes We did not want to tell them what we thought about it all as it would only have created an unfriendly atmosphere towards us who, after all, were foreigners in a foreign land But it was difficult to restrain ourselves

People kept on coming in from the third class compartment to have a sleep in our first class one, but how they could sleep I cannot understand They talked and shouted to each other and seemed to go through their entire life story to every newcomer

Suddenly a waiter came with a tray loaded with tea cups and apparently this heralded meal-time Every one became very busy pulling out parcels of food One man was a bit clumsy when he reached for his bundle on the rack and the contents fell right on the head of the mother and her sick children Later I wondered if he had done it on purpose for the woman sat and blamed fate that she already had two children at the age of twenty-one She blamed the whole world, too, for her children's illness

The child, poor thing, was so hungry that he threw himself at his food and ate like a little pig I looked to see what he was eating and to my horror it was curry and rice with meat. I was very upset and did not know how to tell the mother how wrong she was to give that kind of food to a child suffering from dysentery

I had hardly had time so far to look out and see if the country through which we were passing was interesting, but it definitely was not There was only salt desert. The salt gave the effect of patches of snow lying here and there and it looked as if Lot's wife must have travelled this way and turned round a couple of times for all this salt to have been left behind Big lakes appeared here and there and occasionally relieved the monotony, but these always turned out to be mirages

Now the train rolled into a town and one could see the gorgeous domes and mosques The town was Semnan which is one of the great caravan centres of Persia, lying half way

between Teheran and Meshed with Mazanderan to the north and the vast salt desert to the south It is curious to think that in olden times there were forests and cultivated land where now we find the salt desert. The country must have benefited in those days by the Carez system which even to this day is found all over Persia If modern engineering methods were applied it should be possible to make the desert into fertile land and restore the famous old Persian gardens.

Here again we thought it best to limit this compartment if possible to only the fifteen of us who had been there all the time The compartment was of course really only built for eight But alas first came a servant carrying a huge basket overloaded with fruit and I was anxious to see to whom this belonged As I had imagined following the basket came a jolly fat woman with red lips high heeled shoes and dressed in a silk frock that fitted like a glove As she came in she talked and laughed to the two women who were following behind her They looked prosperous and happy

All three sat down and occupied the whole bench but they told me that I need not worry for only the first fat jolly woman was travelling in the train Then this woman's husband arrived and we were introduced and in less than five minutes we knew more about her husband and her daughter than I know about people I have known all my life Her husband was certainly a fine looking man six feet tall and the jolly woman told me that she married him because he was so attractive to look at She herself was a Catholic and had great difficulty in getting permission to marry him—a Mohammadan but Never mind she said in her broken English I like him very much. She liked her only daughter, too just enough I understood to make life a bit more interesting and not too troublesome

She told me that she herself did all the cooking in her household and as her husband was a fairly high Government official I was rather surprised to hear this When later on I saw what food meant to her I could well understand that only delicacies created by her own hand could satisfy her appetite She told me that she kept travelling between

Teheran, where her daughter attended school, and Semnan, where her husband lived Her daughter, of course, was more or less a genius Her husband needed a great deal of looking after The servants, she complained, did not give him enough to eat when she was away, but judging from his healthy appearance I reckoned she could easily have stayed away for a couple of months before any ill effects would have been noticed

She kept her basket of food handy so that she could dip down periodically and pick up a biscuit for, she explained to me, if she did not have something to eat every half hour she would get some sort of pain in her stomach The child with dysentery looked at her with large hungry eyes every time she put a biscuit in her mouth, for biscuits could not be bought by ordinary people

There were many halts on the way Once the train stopped right out in the wilderness and, looking out, I found every body running as fast as they could across to some men who were selling bread and melons Bread in Teheran was dear, I was told, and almost unobtainable In Afghanistan they roasted the bread In Persia they had the same thin bread unroasted and when they went out shopping they hung the bread over their arms like a hand towel

At another station we heard raised voices outside our compartment Apparently a girl had been given a second class ticket for the same amount of money as one should pay for a first class one and naturally when there was no room in the second class she wanted to travel by first class But the train police and the conductor insisted upon her paying more

She was a most attractive Persian girl and she used all her womanly charm on the railway officials She might have been successful too but she had a friend travelling with her who had five children and this friend said she could not afford to pay more than second class So the loss of money on seven tickets was too much for the police and the conductor, but eventually of course they all landed into our compartment

The train moved and in no time all sorts of discussions were going on in high gear The woman beside me said

that she was sure all the railway officials tried to squeeze more money out of people who had to travel by train Her husband, she told me, had tried to stop this racket on the tickets, but it was difficult for every one was involved. I could well understand how it arose for they all seemed to me to be very under-paid How could they possibly live on fifteen tomans a month when a pair of shoes cost one hundred and twenty

The good looking Persian girl entertained the whole compartment and in no time the corridor was packed with men looking at her She seemed to speak most languages and was a good representative of young Persian womanhood who had emerged from purdah not so many years ago I was told by a European, who had been in Persia during the first years of freedom that the Persian girls had at that time no idea of how to dress in European style If a European woman came into a shop all the Persian girls rushed after her to see what she bought and whenever she so much as touched a particular piece of material it was sold out in less than ten minutes.

Once again I made an attempt at concentrating on the scenery It was still desert but it seemed to be varied now and again by green hillocks I am not sure whether grass gave the green colour to these hillocks but I rather think it was the stone itself Anyhow it was very soothing to the eye and looked magnificent in the setting sun.

It was growing dark and the conductor came round with electric bulbs which were taken out during daytime otherwise they would all have been stolen, like everything else detachable on the train One could not open the window because the handle had gone

The mother, with her five children sleeping all round her, looked like mother earth. She was so happy and gay and by comparison made the other mother, who constantly complained about her two children, ashamed of herself We were by now all very friendly and knew everything about each other because for a long time we had been shouting to each other above the noise of the train and the other passengers. By this time my head felt quite dizzy and it was with relief that we arrived in Teheran about nine o'clock in the evening

CHAPTER XVIII

OVER THE HILLS TO THE CASPIAN

We had been told that it would be difficult to find hotel accommodation in Teheran and so it was The driver who took us from the station realised that we had not been there before and drove us round the town at least three times before stopping at the hotel For this he charged us a small fortune and at the same time tried to convey the impression that it was only because of him that we had managed to get a room at all in this small, peculiar hotel

We were very pleased, however, to get accommodation at all and by comparison with the hotels we had become used to, it was like paradise

There was a wash basin and a tap and I was looking forward to washing all my clothes, but I was rather disappointed when I had to call a servant every time I wanted to let the water out, for it would not run away

The other hotels in Teheran turned out to be really excellent and up to-date A Norwegian whom we met the following day asked us to come and stay with him but as we intended to go right on to the Caspian Sea as soon as possible, so as to live in a green country for a change, we did not think it worthwhile to accept his offer Thinking of the future, however, we said we would be delighted to stay with him on our return to Teheran from the Caspian

Once again we were offered help in the problem of getting train tickets for here we met the same delay But our friends were very proud that they managed to get tickets for the following day The secret of success in obtaining seats was to get to the station early and we were lucky to find comfortable first class window seats We sat there for about three-quarters of an hour, waiting for the train to go Our compartment soon became filled with Russian officers. Amongst them was a Russian girl who interested us very much She, too was dressed in uniform and had short cropped hair A boy friend sat next to her and they

sat talking in whispers for a long time We attempted soon to strike up a conversation with the officers, but by their curt replies we realised that they had no wish to talk to us

Five minutes before the train was due to leave, a Russian guard came into our compartment, asked if we were Russians, and added that all first class compartments were reserved for Russians only We realised we would have to be quick and rushed out and found an empty compartment in the very next wagon but it was locked On our request to the guard to open it he replied that it was reserved We asked "For whom ?" but he would not answer Later we found that the Persian guards had reserved the whole compartment for themselves to sleep in He was furious when we ordered him to open the door for us.

The first part of our trip went over the same route which we travelled when coming into Teheran from Sharud but this time it was in the day time and therefore much more interesting for I could watch the lovely volcano shaped mountain stand out quite alone, rising to a height of eighteen thousand feet. It reminded me very much of Fujiyama in Japan Standing in dry desert country, the wisps of cloud round it were broken by the sun's rays to make the most delicate pastel colours. Its peak, which was just visible, was covered with snow and sometimes the snow cap shone golden pink

Looking at it, I wanted badly to climb it. Why I did not do so I cannot understand It could easily have been done from Teheran in two days time, just by sleeping in the open at night. The weather was ideal at the time for the purpose but the idea of having a bathe in the Caspian had entirely possessed me I was frightened that something would prevent me from feeling the salt Russian water which I imagined at that time would be just as salt as the Dead Sea

One of the Norwegian engineers of the company which had built the railway through the mountains over to the Caspian Sea, had told me something of the difficulties they had met in building the railway, so we followed the passes with great interest

I loved watching the twists and turns which the railway took as it climbed slowly upwards and somehow it created

in me the same feeling which I had felt when as a child I read of the introduction of the train up to Trondheim in Norway It disturbed the Dovregubben He was a big giant who lived in the mountains before the advent of civilization Our present engines were having great difficulty in pulling the train up the hill and had I been a child I am sure I would have thought that once again it was a giant and his family pushing the train back

We reached the seven thousand foot summit and the engineer had told us to watch the landscape as we went down the other side It was extraordinary how the country running towards the Caspian Sea at once changed into the most green and fertile hills For us it was a kind of vision, for we had not seen so much green since Kandahar

What a railway! When I looked at it I felt very proud that so many Norwegian engineers had had a hand in building it I had seen pictures of it and had heard a great deal about it, but to be able to see almost at one time the whole railway descending from seven thousand feet to below sea level within a comparatively few miles was something worthwhile I enjoyed running from one window to the other as we went round curves so as to be always on the side which gave a view Sometimes the curve was so sudden that I became confused and finished up by looking straight into the hill side

Sometimes the train would go into a tunnel and before it emerged again, would almost complete a circle inside the mountain I knew when a circular tunnel was due, and had a big glass of water ready so that I could see the water turning round inside the glass I had done the same thing at home once on the Romsdal railway and it was fun to do it near the Caspian Sea

As we went downhill night was falling, so that now as we drew near the sea the whole valley became like a dark green picture disappearing out of focus

For several months prior to this we had been living at a height of about four thousand feet and coming out of the train at below sea level was like coming into a beehive, for my ears sang and my head felt three times its size It made us tired and bad tempered The station was Chahi, the

THE KING AND QUEEN OF PERSIA.

looked as if there was a kind of understanding between them and the driver Tor had got hold of When the driver saw that we did not give the hotel people big tips he was not too keen to take us to Babolsar

We were dying, however, to get down to the sea to the comfortable hotel in Babolsar which we had heard so much about and eventually we succeeded in getting off The road went through rich fertile country and my old love Dema vend turned up now and again as we swung along the road. Soon I could feel the smell of the sea in the air

CHAPTER XIX

BABOLSAR

When I saw the beautiful blue greenish water I could hardly believe that I had at last arrived at the sea I wanted so much to bathe in My headache disappeared in a flash and I looked round for something new and exciting I was surprised when the scenery again reminded me of something I had seen before, for here were the sand banks of Denmark's coast Only the colour of the sea was different It was quite unique and I had not seen anything like it.

We arrived at Babolsar The hotel looked like a palace with nicely laid out gardens It was situated quite close to the sea—about ten minutes walk down to a white sandy beach, where a most luxurious casino, built in the form of a ship's bridge, lay as if floating in the sand The small town had grown up very discreetly at the back of the dominating hotel The whole place was meant to cater for the idle pleasures of peacetime of course, while now it looked rather war-minded, with all the Russian troops marching up and down in rhythm to their war marches

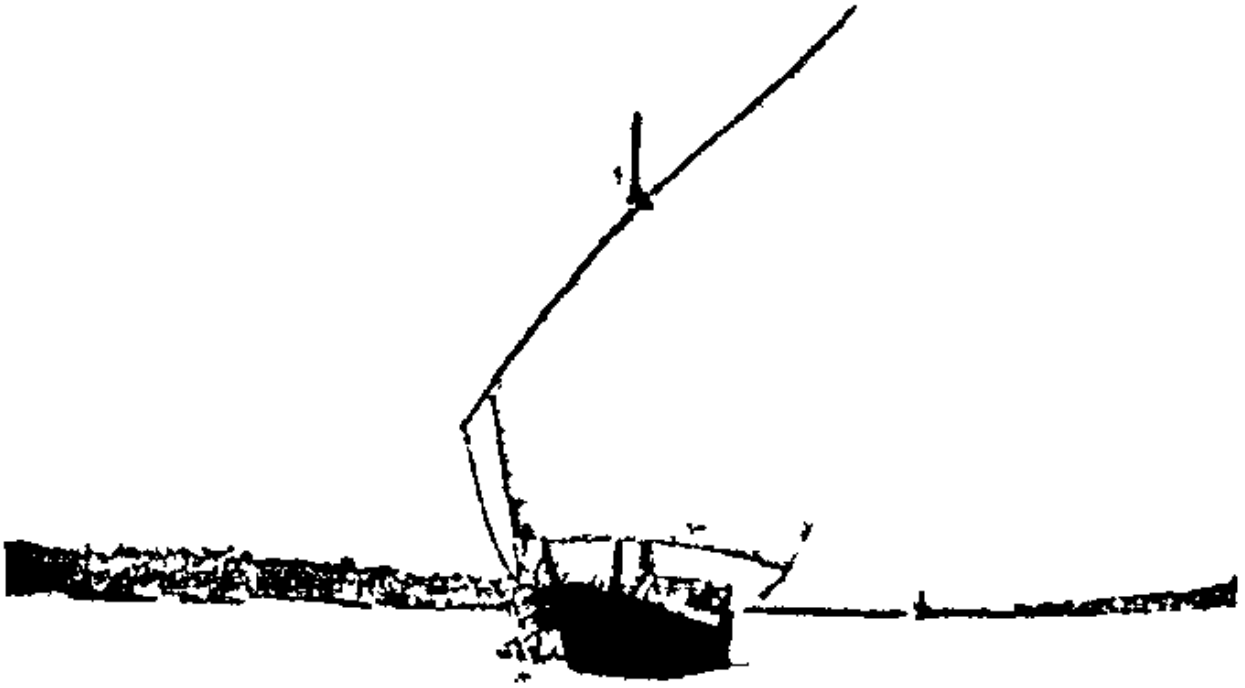
There were Russian soldiers and soldieresses peeping out of most of the bungalows in town which they had occupied There was only one road where we were allowed to walk down on to the beach as the others led to spots reserved for the physical training of troops

The hotel itself looked grand as we came into a big hall covered with some of the best carpets in Persia. The ex-Shah had made a hobby of building magnificent hotels all over Persia—which he had filled with priceless carpets, good old Persian paintings and the finest antique brocades Each hotel was like a museum of Persian arts and crafts The bedrooms were a dream with comfortable beds into which you just sank and fell immediately into a state of coma and were not aware of anything until the following morning when you suddenly awoke and thought "Oh yes, this is the place for caviar alright" but your dream of caviar disappeared when you heard the price of it Our luck was in however, for on the night of our arrival we met a Danish couple who asked us to join in celebrating their wedding anniversary in caviar and champagne The caviar was just right—big black balls like gun powder The food was excellent the fish was fresh from the Caspian Sea and we had a wide variety of vegetables and fruit, all of which grew on the spot

The hotel manager was a most interesting Swiss and he seemed to know everybody worth knowing in Southern Europe I had tea with him and coffee after dinner and I enjoyed his stories very much but when we got a bill of five tomans for the same tea and coffee in addition to our daily bill, which was in any case far above normal, I thought his stories were a bit expensive!

I was dying to have a bathe in the green sea and we walked down to the beach, carefully avoiding the pieces of land under control of the Russian Army The sea was lovely and even in October was warm It was salt but not as salt as I had expected it to be One Persian boy on the beach had invented his own patent for shelter against the sun. From the distance it looked like a sail but actually it was a piece of cloth put up between two sticks and so long as the sun did not shine vertically it was very effective

There was quite an international crowd on the beach—English, Russians, Swiss, Danes, Norwegians and Persians The Russians of course did not mix with the rest of us but I do not think I could have mixed easily with them in their nudist attire



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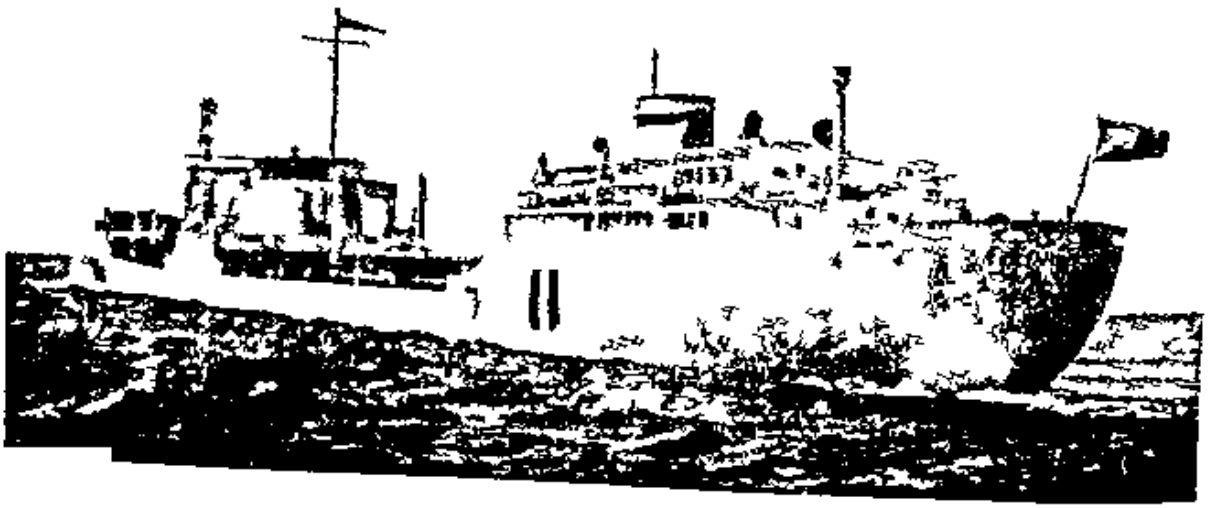


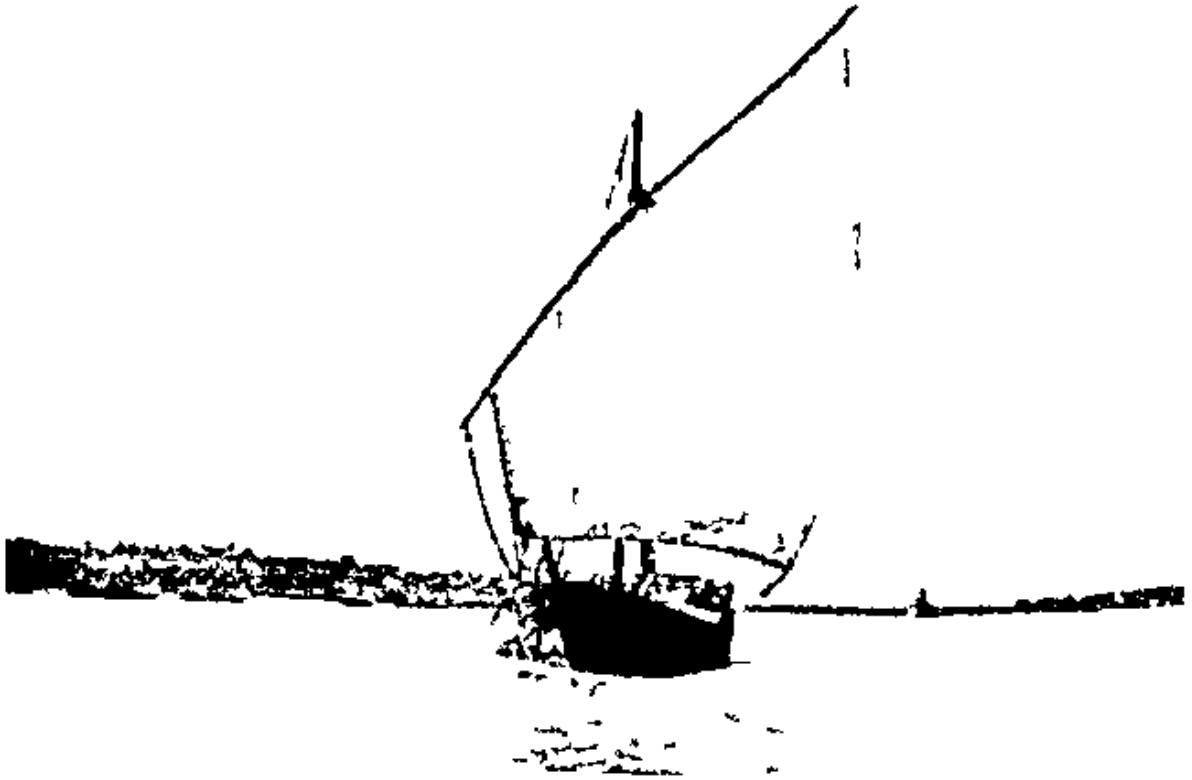
NOR EG A TA ER

nearest place to the big hotel by the Caspian Sea which we wanted to see We had meant to go straight on to the coast but it was dark now and, as all the taxi and bus drivers looked rascals to us, we did not feel like putting our lives and luggage in their care We made up our minds to go straight to the nearest hotel

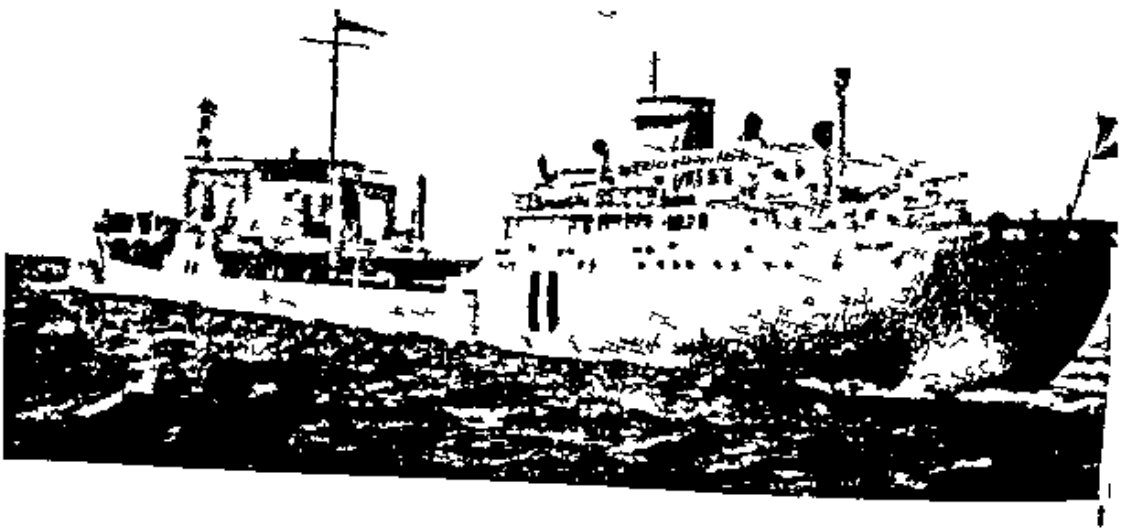
All our possessions could easily have been stolen that night for we could not lock our bed room door and our heads were too thick to hear anything There was something we heard most of the night, however, and that was the Russians singing in their barracks right across the road. I did not mind it at all and I managed to tune it in with the rest of the noises going on in my head so I had a full orchestra right up to three o'clock in the morning Anything was better than that terrific pressure on my ears and eyes

We rose early next morning to try and get a bus, a car or a lorry to drive us out to the Caspian Sea I did not get any further than the corner of the hotel for from there, I could see lovely Demavend still surrounded by its dreamy atmosphere and I stood and watched the mountain for a long time Eventually we heard of a bus or a car which was bound for Babolsar but it is extremely difficult to get anything fixed for a certain time in Persia It must be an ideal country for a philosopher They say "morning," meaning "afternoon" and turn up the following day or, if you are lucky, the day after that

So we resigned ourselves to having breakfast The plates were dirty, one egg was bad and the tea cold served without sugar or milk The pressure on our ears was still unpleasant and it did not make things any better when a man came and stood outside the window making faces at us When we signed to him to go away he laughed like a maniac and rushed off, only to turn up at the next window a new idiotic expression on his face The whole thing did not even raise a mild smile especially when we were grossly overcharged for our room which had dirty sheets on the bed and had no place to wash in The food too was very bad. When we came to pay we asked them why they kept the hotel at all but I rather regretted saying it for it



PERSIAN GULF DHOW



NORWEGIAN TANKER

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I was dying to have a bathe in the green sea and we walked down to the beach, carefully avoiding the pieces of land under control of the Russian Army The sea was lovely and even in October was warm It was salt but not as salt as I had expected it to be One Persian boy on the beach had invented his own patent for shelter against the sun From the distance it looked like a sail but actually it was a piece of cloth put up between two sticks and so long as the sun did not shine vertically it was very effective

There was quite an international crowd on the beach—English, Russians, Swiss, Danes, Norwegians and Persians The Russians of course did not mix with the rest of us, but I do not think I could have mixed easily with them in their nudist attire

It was pleasantly warm after Teheran where a woollen suit would have been the right thing to wear To be sunbathing on this magnificent stretch of sand with the Caspian Sea, caviar and Russians all round us was life at its best We were always conscious of the Russians for they sang day and night and their regimental march had an unmistakably Russian motive about it which fascinated me I lay awake at night listening to their songs They conjured up in my imagination the Russian scene, big boots, huge coats and Cossack caps

The new regiments however had to catch up with the old ones in their ability to sing and march properly and some times their singing did not sound too good Now and again we tried to strike up a conversation with them, but they always avoided us The soldiers themselves looked more Turkoman than full-blooded Russian The uniformed Russian girls looked big and strong enough to move a house if necessary

On the beach I met a young English officer who was there on a short holiday from Iraq He had had great trouble in getting a pass and now he wanted to stay longer, but as his pass had expired he dared not take the risk of staying for another day He was interested to hear that I had come from India and said that that was one place he wanted to go, for one of his ancestors had been an important man there "My grandfather," he said, "was the Englishman who started the Congress party So it goes without saying that I would not be too popular there nowadays"

We talked and talked so much that I forgot that I was still in a wet bathing costume I lay in the shelter of a patent tent but did not realise that there was a strong draught blowing through between the sand and the sail I caught a bad chill in the stomach

We lay and listened to the Russian soldiers singing inside the unfinished ultra modern Casino on the beach It looked lonely and deserted but could have been a lovely place in peace time Here full advantage could have been taken of the sea air, the health giving sun and the eastern moon but gambling in such surroundings did not appeal to me and

yet I suppose some people must always indulge in some form of excitement to feel they are alive

I had to sit in the hotel that afternoon because of the chill I had caught and I sat and talked to some Persian businessmen from Teheran One of them told me that there were few carpets in the hotel worth less than ten thousand tomans each and one, he knew for certain, cost sixty thousand tomans We went and looked at this one and it looked well worth the price

The sun was setting and one of the Persians suddenly interrupted the conversation to ask me where my husband was I told him that he was out walking He looked very worried and said that it was growing late I told him that would be alright

"Well," he went on, "my friend and I went out walking the other night to visit some friends As we were late we took a short cut over a meadow when suddenly from the shadow of some trees stepped a huge Russian soldier who pointed his rifle and bayonet towards us and shouted 'Hands Up' I looked rather stupified as I did not understand any Russian, but my friend did, and seeing him raising his hands I understood and followed suit Although we still held up our hands we could not see the Russian sentry clearly for he remained in the shadow of the trees We were both wearing white suits and when our friends from the boarding house came out to meet us and saw us standing in the dark with our hands up they shrieked and ran back to their bungalow thinking they had seen two ghosts

"I was not inclined to take the situation too seriously so I asked my friend what the Russian meant The Russian shouted again at this and said to my friend that if we talked to each other he would fire Apparently the Russian himself was frightened and that was the dangerous part about it My friend's wife and children were living in the town and probably at the thought of not seeing them again he started crying so much that he shivered all over his body Again I heard the sharp note of a Russian command and my friend stopped crying It was very tiring holding our hands up in the air for so long but as soon as we moved them, the Russian shouted again

"Standing there like that it seemed as if we stood all night Two hours had passed and it was getting very dark At last it seemed to be time to change the guard, for another sentry appeared, and he was sent off to report the case An officer arrived on the scene at once He laughed and told us in Persian to put our hands down, but by this time we could not lower our arms for they were quite stiff and the officer had to help us The whole of my body too was stiff The officer apologised and explained that this soldier was very keen in carrying out his duties and apparently had thought we intended to attack him The events of the evening proved too much of a shock to both of us and I had to stay in bed for two days and be constantly massaged"

As soon as the Persian had finished his story I rushed up to see if my husband had come back and found him singing happily in that lovely long bath attached to our room

CHAPTER XX

CASPIAN LUXURY

The Danish couple had a car which they told us they intended to sell in a short time for sixty thousand tomans A toman is about the same value as a rupee The car was a small five-seater, well kept of course, but it seemed to me a small fortune for any one to pay for a car Off we went in their car to the next place along the coast Tchalousse, where there was also a very large hotel but it was not quite up to the standard of the one we had been living in Tchalousse was the Caspian Sea end of the road which ran over the mountains from Teheran

The drive along the coast lay through miles of green soft fertile country To seaward a mixture of seaweed and sand stretched right out to meet the sea We chose a beautiful spot for a swim The shore was covered with gorgeously coloured shells and on our way back to the car we picked red pomegranates from the bushes They were wild pome-

granates of course, so the taste was not exactly sweet, but I felt I had to eat one after the terrific effort I had made to break the skin which was almost as hard as a walnut

The hotel in Tchalousse had much better food than the previous hotel and altogether there was a more friendly atmosphere We had sent a letter back to Teheran with one of the Persian businessmen to our Norwegian friends there, who had said they would come in their car to meet us at Tchalousse We heard later, however, that the letter never reached them—in spite of the fact that the Persian businessman had promised that he would deliver the letter personally to our friends This meant that we would have once more to revert to our lorry mode of transport I had quickly got used to living in luxury again so I dreaded the thought of a dusty, bumpy lorry We could not get in touch with Teheran either, because there was no telephone or telegraph office in Tchalousse

In the hotel we met a Persian who was an engineer in charge of lorry convoys and he promised us a seat in a lorry if our friends did not arrive This Persian had been brought up in France where his father had been an ambassador and later he had spent some years in New York He had a most attractive personality and an interesting face We had our meals together, and he told us about some of his experiences His manners had a diplomatic trim He gave us wine for dinner and saw to it that the table was well laid and tipped the servant so that dinner would be well served He called me madam and kissed my hand Sitting on the open verandah of the hotel with the lovely garden full of flowers stretching in front of us, we felt as if we were sitting in a little cafe somewhere in France

I asked him if he wanted to go back to Paris and New York after the war "No," he said, "I love my country and my people I could look at them from a distance and also compare them with the Europeans and Americans When abroad I found a lot of similarity between my people and the French Admitted that my country does not enjoy the same high standard of modern comfort, nor do I think they have an appreciation of the poetical and romantic side of life"

I said "The Persians always seem to enjoy their conversation"

"It is considered a great art to show wit, humour and sarcasm in one's conversation," he said, "You will find the ordinary people, I mean those who can hardly read and write, quoting long passages from classical poetry I like the sweet, cultured talk and the joy of the people when they greet each other I know we are dreamers and some times very happy over a glass of wine or a smoke of hukka * And at such times poetry flows fluently"

I noticed that Persians pick up languages very quickly In the streets in Teheran you may meet a Persian speaking Arabic, Turkish and Russian besides his own language From amongst the continental languages French is the most usual The American University in Teheran is responsible for making English popular Is it because of the geographical position of Persia that the Persians are polyglots, or has it anything to do with the Persian language itself? I was told that the prime words and prime numbers in the Persian language are practically the same as in Sanskrit In fact there is a very close affinity between the two †

At the moment we were enjoying a tasty fish from the Caspian sea‡ I said "I am pleased the Ramzan is over" He laughed and said "Do you know, one year when I came back from Europe I made up my mind to go through Ramzan as the others did That was for the first time in my life I realised what hunger and thirst really meant It seems to you perhaps a most cruel and exacting form of fast for a Prophet and legislator to impose on his followers But in actual practice it is of great value It is enjoined on every one The rich are thus made to realise what some of their brothers suffer when they don't get a meal and are brought to sympathise with them Of course, the Prophet gave us our Laws through religion It is forbidden to pray in a

* Hukka is an oriental device for smoking in which the smoke is passed through water before the smoker inhales it From the noise made while smoking it is also known as "bubble bubble"

† For instance Madar pidar dokhtar biradar in Persian are matar pitru duhitru and bhratar in Sanskrit, meaning mother father daughter and brother respectively

‡ At Bandar Pehlavi on the Caspian, there are large fisheries supplying fish to areas hundreds of miles away

house which has been forcibly taken from its rightful owner"

"But doesn't the Quran tell you not to drink?" I asked, "and Persia is full of wine shops and very good wine too!"

"My people have another charm," he said, "and that is that we usually observe the laws with exceptions" He raised his glass and said "Skaal"* Because he had already been taught the Scandinavian custom when we drink wine

Outside the hotel stood Russian guards on both sides of the road which in one direction led to Babolsar and in the other to Teheran Our ambassador, as we liked to call our Persian friend, said that a Russian officer had refused to pay his hotel bill for he considered it unreasonable He had paid what he thought a reasonable price and had gone out to his car ready to drive off to Babolsar But he had to pass the Russian guard, for the hotel proprietor had already been to the local Russian headquarters to complain and the officer was not allowed to pass before he had paid the unreasonable bill

The ambassador came along with us to the transport company in whose lorry we were going to Ramsar There was a hotel in Ramsar which, everyone told us, was still more marvellous than the one in Babolsar We talked to some people at the transport company and found out that it was difficult to go and return in one day We dared not risk staying away any longer as the Norwegian engineer might turn up and think we had gone Instead we rested in the afternoon A servant knocked at the door shortly after we had decided to rest and told us that there were some people to see us We went out and there stood the engineer and his wife They had come all these miles over the mountains to fetch us I was very touched and more so when on the following day I saw the dust and the nature of the road they had travelled over

They suggested right away that they would take us along to Ramsar and off we drove once again along the beautiful

* Skaal is a Scandinavian word It dates from the old Vikings time when they used to pass round a big bowl of beer—a bowl called Skaal

sea coast road It was not far away and soon we were driving through the avenue of orange trees which led up to the famous hotel

Shah Riza could have received any royal person at this place and I suppose that was really his idea, for he had built his summer residence close by

The hotel was situated on a hill side, at the edge of a forest, and from the hotel broad steps led down to the garden from which a six mile long avenue led right down to the Casino on the seashore

A Norwegian we had met previously had told us that he thought there were too many statues in the garden He was right, for the garden was full of statues and I could not stand being stared at by so many faces as I walked down the length of the garden The statues seemed to me to spoil the whole effect, at least at close quarters, so I hurried through the garden But when I stood on the terrace and saw before me the whole plantation of a hundred thousand orange trees, overshadowed by the forest-clad mountains I really thought it was what a Shah's summer residence ought to look like

The Casino repaid closer study The furniture was upholstered in coloured leather The fittings on the doors and windows were chromium plated There was a bar in the latest American style and a neat American kitchen There were dressing rooms rest rooms, massage rooms, and in fact everything to make life worth living

There were only about ten people staying in the huge hotel, but who cared if it payed or not for it was all kept up by the State The manager once complained to the old Shah of the small number of people who stayed in the hotel and suggested that they should reduce the prices otherwise nobody would come at all Shah Riza answered that it was the very best thing that could happen because then guests would not wear out the furniture and carpets Throughout the journey I noticed that there are many different opinions as to how a hotel should be run

The food was good and we thoroughly enjoyed our dinner and our breakfast next morning After that we returned to Tchalousse

On our way back we stopped at a little village to buy some salmon for dinner which we had hoped to have in Teheran The market place was a model of modern town planning It was built in a circle with streets leading off from it Another of the Shah's inspirations Everything looked very tidy and clean, but somehow the people did not seem to fit their new surroundings Here they lived in an area where they had all the necessary food for building strong and healthy bodies and yet as we looked at them standing helpless staring at us round the car, they all looked like mummies brought to life, or dwarfs Many seemed to suffer from goitre and most of them had enlarged spleens owing to malaria

I thought of the giants I had seen in Afghanistan where every scrap of food is obtained only with struggle Here was an abundance of vegetables and fruit and as much fish as anyone could wish for in the sea nearby and still they were very stunted in growth

We stopped and enjoyed our last bathe in the Caspian sea Our friends warned us, however, not to venture too far out to sea for the waters here were frequented by a fish like a swordfish which had been known to attack human beings One man in fact had recently been killed by one of them So we might easily have been turned into some sort of caviar Eventually we arrived back at our hotel in Tchalousse and had lunch there

Then we started off on the road to Teheran up through a thicket Soon we were out of the forest, but the road still climbed and the summit of the pass was almost as high as the railway pass over which we had gone on our way to Teheran Sometimes the road was very narrow and here guards controlled the heavy traffic

At the top of the pass we went through a mile long tunnel The tunnel had its uses for it kept at least the highest part of the road free from snow in the winter time There were guards at both ends of the tunnel who were in telephonic communication with each other so as to be able to control

the traffic, for this part of the road was very narrow and did not allow two cars to pass One lorry had broken down on the way through and almost completely blocked the tunnel and with great difficulty we managed to pass it

When Shah Riza built this road, little did he know that the advent of the war would turn it into one of the most used roads in the world He had brought it into being in the first place just so as to be able to get to his summer residence once or twice a year

On the way down the other side of the pass we intended to have tea at an attractive old house where the Shah used to stop on his way to and from his residence, but we walked all round the house trying to find some one in charge but without success A little way back up the road we had passed a big stationary convoy of lorries Now we noticed that the convoy had already started moving, so we rushed to our car to try and get ahead of them Some of them managed to get in front of us and we suffered their dust for a long time before we managed to pass them We were thankful that the engineer and his wife had come to fetch us in their car, otherwise we would have had to travel in one of these big lorries in convoy and I hate to think of the dusty condition we would have been in at the end of the journey

The countryside gradually faded as darkness came I fell asleep and did not awake until I found myself at the entrance to our friend's house in Teheran Our appetites grew as we smelt the salmon, which we had brought, being cooked It was served in the good Norwegian style There were hot curly pieces of red salmon with melted butter and fresh boiled potatoes Our friends were famed for having one of the best tables in Teheran and I could well imagine why

They had a charming old fashioned bungalow with a big garden and it was a dream to have breakfast on the verandah, sitting in the morning sun and starting off with caviar and good Norwegian coffee—or should I say Scandinavian ?

CHAPTER XXI

IRAN'S CAPITAL

My previous impression of Teheran was of a beautiful town in a lovely setting of snow-clad mountains Parts of the town had an unfinished appearance for some of the big modern official buildings had been left incomplete The architects seem to have enjoyed themselves by experimenting in many different styles, but probably the residences belonging to the various Legations were the most magnificent.

I was surprised, though, to find that what I had heard about the water supply system was true At certain hours of the day water was forced up through the open drains on both sides of the street and at these times it was in everybody's interest to collect in receptacles as much water as possible from the drains The water was then transferred into big tanks in the gardens or on the roofs of houses

I am sure this water, which is meant for ordinary gardening purposes, is used as drinking water by those who do not trouble to fetch drinking water from the British Legation which has its own water distillery I saw water being carted round for sale in big barrels, and I thought it was strange that the Government had not seen fit to arrange for a proper water supply before all the magnificent buildings and hotels had been put up

When I saw people sitting washing their clothes and bodies, their pots and pans in the open drains I was not surprised to learn that there was a good deal of disease in Teheran

But the town is making some progress during the war for it has become an important centre The advent of modern methods and equipment is rather a new thing for Persia, but one can see how it is already breaking up long standing systems.

I heard a story of how not many years ago a royal party was touring in Persia They had to stop at a small town

The Persians had overlooked the question of beds for the royal visitors and their servants, so they asked the British Legation to help them out of the difficulty Lorries loaded with beds were sent to the small town and arrived just before the Royal party

As I said before, purdah was only recently lifted in Persia and one could see that some of the older women had not yet got used to the sudden change

The old Shah Riza Pahlavi, was very strict that the women should obey, when he first had given them the order to discard the purdah When the Shah had to leave during the last trouble in Persia, the women who were still a bit shy about their uncovered faces adopted a sort of skirting hood, made very often of flowery cotton This they wore on the head, hanging down on both sides and at the back They could easily cover up their faces in a hurry that way It looked extremely ugly and did not fit into the picture of the town at all

I suppose I looked rather out of place too when I went into town in my slacks It was a bit of an experiment which I only did once I was made so uncomfortable by the persistent staring of the people and sometimes by their open laughter, that I soon rushed home again through the back streets

I heard a story of a certain astute businessman who, in anticipation of the day which had been fixed for the removal of Purdah, had taken into stock masses of European style women's hats He made a fortune out of them, for no matter what the hats looked like, he was completely sold out in no time I believe the sight was one which feminine eyes at least could not easily forget, for many did not know the back from the front of their hats

There was an attractive bungalow with a big garden which had been made into the Scandinavian Club It was excellently run by a Scandinavian girl and I was told that at the time when Scandinavian engineers were working on the railway line to the north it had been a very lively spot. But by this time the railway had been completed and the engineers scattered all over the world, they had left a

certain heritage behind and it was strange for me to find Ibsen and other books in my own language for sale in the secondhand book shops

Being in Persia, we naturally wanted to buy some Persian carpets We hunted round, but in all the shops we visited we found that the carpets were all new and were fabulously priced One year ago, a shopkeeper told us, every one bought carpets as a method of investing money and that was why all the best old carpets had gone

One of our countrymen showed me a beautiful old Persian carpet he had been lucky to buy in Persia before they were sold out. He was looking forward to taking it home to his wife in America When he came back here again after several months I asked him how he got on with the carpet—he told me he had to pay a lot of duty for it "My wife was disappointed," he said, "she asked me why I had bought an old carpet when there surely were plenty of new ones to be had"

As far as I could see, the only thing at a reasonable price was Persian silver But none of the designs appealed to me They were all too over-worked and intricate and I should imagine would make any housewife or servant furious at the idea of having to clean them.

I can at least boast that I had a glimpse of one of the world's most attractive women, for one day as I passed the palace garden I saw the beautiful Queen of Persia standing looking at her children. The new architectonic palace, surrounded by lovely gardens, gave the mother and children a lovely setting In every house throughout Persia there was a picture of the royal family. If they did not understand my Persian they certainly understood it when I told them they had a beautiful queen.

Our hosts took us for a drive outside Teheran Two first class roads led out to a summer palace built on a hillside some hundred of feet above the town, which itself stands three to four thousand feet above sea level.

There are many Europeans and Persians who have got beautiful bungalows where they go to in the hot weather, some of them with swimming pools in their gardens But

as I have said, the Legations claimed pride of place in this respect We motored past garden after garden and caught a glimpse of Demavend on the way up We passed the summer palace which belonged to the Shah and on top arrived at the lovely hotel also built by him The garden resembled the one in Ramsar, with a superabundance of statues and big vases, so many that we could hardly see the flowers

The hotel, like the others, had beautiful carpets and paintings The verandah gave the most lovely view of Teheran which, seen from there, looked as if it lay in a valley

Behind the hotel many refreshing walks led up the hillside and I was told that it was from here that one could climb Demavend

A little stream came down from the mountains and beside it were paths which crossed the stream by small bridges, and here people used to walk out from the town for a breath of fresh, cool air Here also was the place where people skied in winter time

CHAPTER XXII

THE PEACOCK THRONE

It was Sunday when we went to see the Peacock Throne which, we were told, was in the Old Palace I was thrilled as we made our way to the Gulistan Palace, for here at last I was going to see the Indian Moghal Throne, so you can imagine my disappointment when they said the palace was closed and would not be open until the afternoon

I was thought to be rather mad when I wanted to set off again to see it, immediately after lunch So I said "Why should I not miss an afternoon's rest to see the treasure when I have travelled the same long road as the Throne was carried, all the way from India?"

Off we went to the Old Palace garden There a guide offered to take us round and it struck me that our guide was just like old Uncle Billie in Delhi and, judging by the authoritative way he spoke of olden times, he could well have been one of Shah Jahan's own private bodyguards

He walked round, dressed in a big cloak, with an air of tremendous importance and dignity which made us walk on tip-toe along the well polished floor. As we walked up the steps to the hall on the first floor, the picture of the Durbar Hall in Delhi flashed across my mind—and I heard the old guide's voice saying " and here was Shah Jahan seated in all his glory, surrounded by his people and greatly admired and respected by them "

I thought of the green emeralds, the peacock blue sapphires, the pigeon-blood coloured rubies, the sparkling diamonds

The Old Palace looked like a museum and I could see as I passed along, that there were many valuable and interesting articles in the glass cases lining the walls I did not have time to investigate them, as I was too anxious to see the throne first So I whispered " Where is the Peacock Throne ? "

The guide pointed to the far end of the enormous hall and there was " the throne " placed in state between mirror-covered walls which made it look more imposing that I had ever dreamt of " Takht-i-Nadiri " means Nadir's Throne I was told that when Nadir Shah came back with the throne to Persia after looting Delhi, he was so fascinated by its beauty that he had a copy made of it

Nadir Shah's reign did not last long he was killed by his own officers His successors sold the valuable stones wherever they could The throne was so badly dismantled that it was almost irreparable But Aga Mohammed Khan utilized what was left and constructed a new throne

So here we were standing looking at the throne of all thrones, once so glorious and so envied It was certainly made in peacock design, inlaid with large emeralds. It looked so marvellous and fascinating

The design of the throne struck me as being Europeanised and not so oriental as I thought it would be Surely the Moghal Emperors sat crosslegged on their thrones and not as we sit in chairs

Shah Jahan had such immense treasures in his palace that he invited suggestions from artists to choose some elaborate design so that all his coloured gems could be used

The peacock is in many parts of India, even to-day, a sacred bird It signifies royal splendour Taking their inspiration from this fact the artists suggested the design of the Peacock Throne It gave them unique scope for utilising a variety of coloured precious stones The rich pattern pleased the pompous and art-loving Shah Jahan

Koh-i-Noor—"Mountain of Light"—the famous diamond was also taken away to Persia by Nadir Shah Later in the course of history it went to Afghanistan, and then to Ranjit Singh, the last ruler of the Sikhs Eventually it passed to Queen Victoria

I think the guide suspected me, for I knelt down several times to look at the side of the throne Some stones had been extracted and I could well imagine the temptation to most people if they got a chance, especially to some of the poorer people in Persia, for any one of these stones, if real, would enable a man to live comfortably all his life and would allow him to sit smoking his *hukka* all day long Certainly these stones, if not real, were all good copies and I felt sure that the real stones had been cut in Jaipur where the Moghal Emperors used to keep hundreds of stone-cutters. Jaipur is in fact a centre of Indian stone-cutting to this day

The pearls in the throne were enormous and must have been of great value, before they were replaced

I had taken such a long time over the throne that the rest of the party was getting impatient to see some of the other things

There was a lovely carpet which I shall never forget It had a sort of silky surface, the design in colours of rust and pink, was of small roses—a carpet for a Queen But I could not help thinking of the artisans who perhaps had given up a great part of their lives or offered their

children's eyes for this carpet so that a grand lady could place her feet on it for a minute or two each day The East is full of such anomalies One of the worst was I think, when Alexander the Great ordered a beautiful Persian town to be burnt to the ground just to satisfy the capricious mind of one of his mistresses It showed the capacity for vanity cruelty and sadism which most conquerors have Cleopatra on the other hand when she swallowed a very valuable pearl at a dinner party probably ate it because she lacked calcium

Before leaving Teheran I wanted to see the hotel and garden where our Norwegian boys escaping from Norway celebrated their 17th of May which is Independence Day in Norway They had told me about it in Bombay Apparently there was rioting at the time in Teheran so they could not celebrate the National Day by the usual method of holding a demonstration in the streets so they just had to be content with walking up and down the hotel and round about the garden where they finished off with a very inspiring speech by one of the boys

I saw the garden and wished I had been there at the time and I could picture one of the young boys giving his enthusiastic speech all the while the crowd waving their sticks and threatening the enemy and expressing a determination that they and they alone should be allowed to win their country back again

I am sure Teheran had never before seen more enthusiatic patriots than this small group of Norwegian youngsters who escaped through Sweden and Russia to reach Teheran and from there to go to Bombay and on to England in order to serve their King and country

Our hosts saw us off on the train which again was very crowded I was pleased by now that the country around Teheran was uninteresting to look at for I was very tired

It was a pity that we went through the mountains in the night for I had wanted to see this part of the railway very much and in fact did sit up most of the night peering out of the window to see what there was to be seen in the dark. It was very similar to the line down to the Caspian Sea but

the moonlight gave a certain magic magnificence to the scenery.

It was strange to see Americans driving the train and at every station Americans appeared on the scene to welcome us and to see us off again The Americans drove the train, the British Government looked after our passes and the Persian Government our tickets, so we could not go far wrong

The following day we were dropped off at a little station in the middle of the desert It was Awaz Two soldiers came up to me and asked if I was English I said I was Norwegian "There you see," said the smaller one to the other, "talk in your own language now"

The boy he referred to was a tall Swedish-American He had lived in America for fifteen years and had almost forgotten his own language The smaller boy told me with some pride that he himself was a Red Indian One could have told that from his profile and the shape of his head and he just lacked the feathers on top and hanging down his back to be an advertisement for the wild and woolly West. He made the same sort of noise too as, from the films one expects to hear way out West—"*Ko i-i-i-Ho*"

They were very pleased to find out that we were going by the same train to Khorramshahr and they asked us to join the rest of them They almost carried us into their compartment

The Red Indian boy introduced the whole compartment to us adding "*If you have not seen the American Army* before you will certainly see it now" I think he had already drunk quite a lot of vodka and later I saw some of the boys very drunk

It takes a good stomach to stand that sort of thing in such terrific heat, or anywhere for that matter The Red Indian enjoyed calling attention to a soldier in the corner who looked rather embarrassed for he knew that the Red Indian was liable to say anything The Red Indian went on: "He used to be an Irishman—a good type too," and added: "Here is a Scotsman," but he need not have told me all *that for I can always pick out a Scotsman in a crowd* It was interesting to see how many countries of Europe were

represented amongst these American soldiers and how one could almost tell which country they came from, for most of them had not yet lost their national characteristics

The Red Indian was very proud of his Swedish-American friend He was finely built, and had fair hair and lovely blue eyes—a fine Nordic type

After this lengthy introduction they shared their tinned food with us It was excellent. Peaches in six pound tins, biscuits, cheese, chocolates, chewing gum, of course, and cigarettes At every station the Persian children lined up and they threw food out of the window to them

Later I heard that some of the Persians took advantage of the generosity of American soldiers and went from one American camp to another and collected tinned stuff from the soldiers' daily rations and sold it again, sometimes to the Americans Of course, then they paid very high prices

The American soldiers had adopted the Eastern way of cooling water but instead of using mud jars they had made long canvas bags which hung outside the carriage window It tasted very cold in that terrible heat.

The distance from Awaz to Khorramshahr is only forty miles but the journey seemed to take a very long time In the dust of the desert it was difficult to see much outside Hundreds of dust devils, which started by picking up the sand in a big ring, went higher and higher skywards in a spiral shape until the centripetal force no longer held the sand together, when billions of microscopic pieces of sand would fly off in all directions It looked as if there was a continuous sandstorm at some places and I fancied I could see lakes and other shapes in the landscape, but they were only mirages.

CHAPTER XXIII

OIL CITY

Coming into Khorramshahr I did not see any station—only a few warehouses So we were rather lost here amongst the railway tracks. Nor did there appear to be any taxis or horse-carriages When the Swedish American offered us a lift we were very pleased ,

The jeep took us right through Khoiramshahr to the oil company's resthouse on the riverside, where we were asked to stay The driver of the jeep said he had not spoken to a woman for two years, so instead of our thanking him he thanked us for coming with him The resthouse was built in a square with a nice lawn in the centre The idea, I suppose, was to protect the rooms from the dust of sandstorms Khorramshahr is situated along the bank of the Karu river overlooking Abadan island I went round the place but the dust spoiled any attraction it might have had The silverware in the bazar looked interesting, but shopping was impossible as the prices were shocking Even old clothes were bought up at high prices The sailors told me they got about twenty tomans for an old pair of shorts

The British Club was very nice and the Consulate garden a mass of flowers Elsewhere that part of the riverside was covered with date baskets which were brought in by native dhows from the date groves situated on both sides of the river and gulf

The date palm, with its rough trunk, has a gay and romantic life In its habits it is polygamous—and there are two sexes ' When the trees are in flower, the so called wedding takes place Flowers from the male palm are taken to be sprinkled onto the blossoms of the female every year Unless they are brought together, good dates cannot be grown Around Basrah the date palms are planted in groups of thirteen—one male to twelve females

The dates were taken into big old storehouses along the river front where they were stored, dried and packed in attractive Arabian boxes—untouched by hand, but not by toes, for the baskets were stamped on by all sorts of people and creatures as they lay on the bank The old fascinating paddle-boats, used as ferries over the river to Abadan, had mostly been replaced by motor boats and more recently by fast moving speed boats and later still by amphibious vehicles It was the first time I had seen them and as I watched them rolling into the water I thought it was a motor accident and rushed off to see what would happen to the people inside the car when they reached the bottom of the river.

The motor trip up to Basrah, which did not take long, was interesting as was this age-old port of Iraq

These places up in the corner of the Persian Gulf are the home of the Iranian navy The colourful uniform of the police gendarmerie, customs officers and naval personnel lent a gay atmosphere to the khaki-coloured riverside

We had to cross the river to go Abadan which lies on an island As we drove along towards the oil town we were told all about the famous oil pipeline, part of which we could see as it carried millions of gallons along the Karun valley, down from the mountains north of Awaz, right across the desert and the Bahmashire river to the refinery at Abadan, where it was refined into kerosene, benzine petrol, heavy oils and most important of all in wartime, aviation spirit This oil refinery is now one of the largest in the world

I was taken with the little paradise they had created out out what not many years ago had been nothing but a swampy island Here stands now a modern town.

The heat in the summer months is terrific but the Europeans live very comfortably in air-conditioned bungalows There are air-conditioned canteens and restaurants A big open air cinema to accommodate about a thousand people attracted me very much There was a sweet dancing club on a ship in the river, with a most romantic mile-long bridge leading out to it through weeds and swamp land. The rose gardens were lovely too and a good place for a cooling stroll after the exertion of dancing on the upper deck. But I did not like the sharks swimming around in the water

There were many swimming pools and a big one at the sailors' home which also had air-conditioned rooms There was an eighteen holes golf course in the desert, tennis and cricket and speed boat races on the river

Abadan has a polyglot population—Americans Europeans Persians Indians and Arabs

In the air-conditioned hospital we found ten Norwegian sailors They were very happy and told me that they felt just as much at home as in a Norwegian hospital I think this was to be expected, for one of the doctors was a Scots-

man who was very attached to the Norwegian sailors for he reckoned the Norwegians and Scots to be related We had dinner at this doctor's bungalow and his wife told us that the Norwegian sailors were among the best behaved patients in the hospital

In spite of the fact that most people reckon Abadan to be a most God forsaken spot, I certainly enjoyed my stay there

As I walked along the river side I was reminded of the strenuous efforts made in India to collect scrap metal Here on the beach were thousands of empty tins washed ashore In fact the Persians went round and picked out the best ones amongst them whereas further north in Persia one hardly saw metal or tins at all The poor women who washed their clothes in the river had to place planks over the tins to avoid cutting their feet

CHAPTER XXIV

TANKER PASSAGE

We had made arrangements to go back to India in a Norwegian cargo ship, but the ship was delayed and would not leave for some time There happened to be another Norwegian ship there, an oil tanker, and although we had to travel on this ship at our own risk we thought it better to do this than wait for the other ship

When I came on board the Captain said to me "You know this is a tanker, how do you dare take such a risk and come with us ? I certainly would not unless I absolutely had to" I must admit I felt a bit nervous after this and also because we had heard rumours of the presence of submarines in the waters through which we would have to pass The two oil engineers who lived in the bungalow enjoyed frightening us when they heard we intended travelling in a tanker But we had made up our minds and no matter how much we feared the consequences we were committed

Actually we had been offered a lift by car down to Quetta and this was very tempting at the time If I had changed

my mind and not gone by sea I should never have been able to look our sailors in the eye again, for why should not we, for ten days, go through the dangers which they were going through nearly every day in the year

The tanker was one of the latest in the Norwegian fleet, beautifully designed and most comfortable and our cabin was like a pleasant little home We were assured that there was no danger, at least for the first six days of our voyage, so we were able to relax and enjoy every second of it

All night as long as we were in smooth water I used to put my bed on deck and watch the stars and try to fall asleep Every Norwegian ship has a well-equipped library and here was my favourite collection of Wildenweys poems and in the daytime I would learn them off by heart and repeat them when I lay on deck under the stars But all the time as I lay I could not get rid of the fear of being torpedoed any moment

Fear usually dispels concentration, but I found that I was able to concentrate on these poems better than I had ever done before and each line as I repeated it to myself, seemed to have a significance which I had not grasped before In the end I had to adopt an indifferent attitude towards the danger What does it matter, I thought, if our body dies What does it matter as long as the effort we have brought to bear in life and the goodwill we have created is somewhere and somehow preserved

When I lay there thinking and reciting Wildenweys I could not help thinking of my children at home in Norway and I knew that nearly every one on board had similar thoughts They all wanted to come through alive so that they could see their families at home once more We were in fact all in the same boat

I got to know all the sailors on board as they came to do their daily round of work. I used to talk to them during their off duty period which they used to pass lying on deck listening to a gramophone or reading books The opening remark was of course always to ask what news had been received from families at home, as every Norwegian naturally is very interested in his own people and in the

resistance to Nazi aggression which the people in Norway are putting up

One of the sailors said "I wish I were at home so that I also could suffer with them and help them in their resistance

"I feel ashamed," he went on, "We do nothing compared with them"

I told him that I was sure that had he been at home he would not have failed to help to the maximum and I pointed out to him that in any case the danger which the people at home ran could not be worse than that in which he constantly lived by sailing the seas on an oil tanker

Sailing down the Persian gulf was pleasant and I enjoyed every minute of it At one place we waited for other ships to join our convoy and it looked as if we were going to be thirteen in a convoy I always seem to strike that number or perhaps it is that I always notice that number when I come across it while other numbers do not attract my attention at all

The Captain used the opportunity when the convoy was being assembled to practice boat drill The lifeboats were lowered into the water and every one put on lifejackets The sailors told us that the water usually caught fire when a tanker was torpedoed The best thing was to remove the lifejacket and keep underneath the water for as long as possible I told them I was a good diver which was a lie Anyhow, if I had met any of the black and yellow snakes which I saw swimming about on the surface of the water, I think I would have drowned straight away from terror

All the equipment on the lifeboats was checked up, food, water, compass etc and it all seemed to be in first class condition

The equipment in these lifeboats had been thoroughly tested particularly in one case where a Norwegian captain and his crew had stayed afloat in their lifeboat for thirty-two days and had lived on the rations they had in the lifeboat, occasionally supplemented by raw flying fish which landed in the boat

As we rowed away in lifeboats from the ship I liked the direct way in which the sailors could talk of our chances of survival in the event of something happening to the ship I talked to the officer in charge with the intention of getting something out of him I asked him what he thought our chances were

"None whatsoever," he answered, "except by parachute, of course When you are blown up you might land safely that way"

I said to him "If the petrol burns on the water would not the flames reach very high?"

"Oh yes," he replied "It is surprising how high the flames reach" He told me of one sailor who was on board the ship who was the only survivor from a petrol tanker which had been sunk He was a good swimmer and had escaped by swimming mostly underneath the water and he had been lucky in reaching a patch where oil covered the water instead of petrol He stayed in this oil patch until the flames covering the water all round him had gone out

I saw a chance of consoling myself here, and I said "I am sure the oil would cover most of the water in our case"

"How could it?" he replied, "when we carry no oil whatsoever, it is all petrol."

"Anyhow," I said, trying to console myself again, "There are no sharks just here"

"Perhaps not," he said, "but the fish in these waters are much worse" I looked at him, he was quite serious and calm

I said to him "But when you know of all these dangers and you go through them every day for years, do you not still feel very frightened?"

"Oh," he said, "We just put off thinking about it till it happens and at that moment we are all too busy to worry about our fear"

He laughed at that and said "Let us try the sail, boys, and whistle up a breeze" It was a gorgeous day and it was difficult to imagine the possibilities which were always present We sailed back to a good cup of coffee and lovely

soft cake made by the excellent Danish cook we had on board

After coffee I went up on deck again and stood watching the different kinds of fish which I could see I liked in particular to watch the flounder when they came up to the surface They moved so slowly that I shouted to the boys who ran for their fishing nets and succeeded in hauling in quite a number in no time The Captain came along and told me that he had just received a report of the presence of a submarine somewhere out in the open sea I was proud of the fact that he had told me at all but I could not help feeling a bit upset

CHAPTER XXV

LIABLE TO BE TORPEDOED

It was a new thing to me to have to face a definite possibility of death and I was trying hard to get used to it, but of course even when I kept saying to myself that there was no need to worry, I only succeeded in making myself even more conscious of the danger.

We usually had a drink before dinner every night with the Captain and the officers and it was at this time that we used to listen to the European war news

I liked the first engineer who was a pleasant, typical old sailor and he thoroughly enjoyed telling stories over his whisky and soda He told me how once he was sitting in his comfortable cabin chair reading a good book, when a big wave, one of those enormous waves which suddenly arrive for no reason at all, came swirling into his cabin, lifted him and his chair out through the door on to the deck and he found himself sitting there still reading his book up against a railing after the wave had gone He did not notice that he had said "still reading the book," so he laughed heartily when I said to him "It must have been a very interesting book indeed"

I was very sorry next day when the Captain told me he had just heard that this old engineer's son had been lost on another ship The Captain asked my advice as to whether he should tell him about it or not It was very difficult to say what to do I thought of the happy old man whose heart would be broken when he got the news that his only son was dead, and it might easily have upset the others on the tanker very much I thought on the whole it would be better to tell him when they were ashore for a spell

Standing on deck beneath the stars, watching a ship glide through the big soft sea, is always conducive to philosophic reflection The first officer and I often used to talk about life in general I said I was inclined to believe in some form of re-incarnation whereby we came back after death to continue with our previous efforts on the road to perfection and understanding He agreed it was a satisfying theory but I do not think he needed it for he was not afraid of death His main thought was for his wife and daughter in Norway and he told me that he and many others had ordered woollen clothing in South America for their families and paid for it so that it would be delivered to their families by the first boat which went home after the war

The officers had told me how phosphorescent and beautiful the sea outside Karachi looked in the moonlight We were due to pass by there during the night so at about four o'clock in the morning I went up on the bridge for I was determined to see if they had exaggerated their description I could not believe my eyes The water had changed into a sea of fire We sailed in light The other ships in the convoy pushed fire out to both sides as they moved along

I remarked to the first officer "Surely this light must be very dangerous, for a submarine can see us from far away" But he answered "On the contrary it is the other way round, for aeroplanes can see a submarine much deeper down in the water when it has phosphorescence all round it So I think it tends to keep them away in these waters Sometimes of course they mistake a big fish for a submarine because the movements of the fish also stir up phosphorescence"

How often, I thought, had I discredited sailors' yarns, but now I would be more inclined to believe in their truth, especially when they related to natural phenomena

I often used to stand on the bridge looking anxiously out to sea to spot a periscope I would go over in my mind what I would do if I saw that periscope Suddenly a great black mass came right up out of the water between our ship and the next one I got such a fright that I shrieked a bit, but the officer standing next to me who was an old whaler, laughed and said it was only a fine big whale It spouted, and then seemed rather confused to find itself surrounded by boats and dived immediately We saw it several times after that

The boys on board were excited at having a whale alongside and I could see how anxious they were to catch it, but there was no hope of this as we were in convoy and had no equipment in any case

Well, that had given me some little experience of being frightened By now an aeroplane flew over our heads all the time I stood watching it and when I saw it dropping down flares I guessed that to be an indication of a submarine in the vicinity My guess appeared to be correct for we started changing course very rapidly several times

I went to bed that night wearing my life jacket and I repeated all Wildenweys' poems right through before I fell off to sleep

It is a strange experience to walk about on a ship which is liable to be torpedoed any minute In the end one gets used to it to a certain extent so that one does not really think about it But the fear, ever-present in one's subconscious mind always makes one add the conditional sentence ' If we ever reach harbour this time" When harbour is reached I can easily understand why sailors come ashore saying ' Let us drink and enjoy ourselves Let us feel life for once, for we never know what will happen next voyage"

One night the Captain asked me if I would accept a souvenir which he had bought in Java It was a lovely salad set made of horn and inlaid with beautiful silver work

"I really meant to take it home," he said, "but I doubt if I shall ever get home" I thanked him very much, but there was a mutual understanding that if I got home to Norway, I would give it to his wife

My own fervent hope is that I shall be able to do so and also be able to tell her how her husband was respected and loved for his fair dealing

He liked to talk about the danger we were in and how he would act in certain situations "I know," he said, "the enemy pays most attention to the Captain in order to try and extract secret information from him" He said he had heard of one officer who was captured by the Japanese and, in order to save the Captain who always carries the code book with him, said that he did not know where the Captain was The Japanese then said that if the officer did not tell them they would shoot every one in the lifeboat.

Another story was of the Japanese taking the Captain of a torpedoed ship on board their submarine They tied him to the conning tower and when he refused to answer any questions they just dived, taking the Captain with them

I think our Captain tested his own strength by picturing himself in similar positions I could tell when he had come to a conclusion for the change in his face was very marked and his expression grew more determined

We arrived in Bombay harbour after many days' delay We saw Kenery island on the right, Trombay to the left and Elephanta straight ahead—all these hills were well-known and dear to us I felt and knew it was our journey's end, home to safety and comfort—while our sailors had to go on and out again in few days time My conscience told me I ought to go on and risk my life as they did.

It was difficult to say good-bye because I could not tell them they were safe in going out again In my heart I was thankful that I had been able to meet such fearless men, and was proud that they were my countrymen

The only thing was to welcome them to Bombay again and say that we hoped to see them all safe and well

EPILOGUE

One day, some time afterwards, I went into my husband's office in Bombay and he said "I have very sad news for you today The tanker we sailed in has been torpedoed, the survivors are in India and will be coming to Bombay in a few days time"

I was most anxious to meet them and I asked the Sailors' Home to let me know as soon as they arrived When I went to see them I was so excited about who had survived that I hardly dared put that question to them We sat down and they started to tell me the story I then picked up courage and looking round I said "Are all the survivors here," for they were very few "Oh no," they replied, "some have got out already on another trip, others have gone to London"

"We did not have much chance," they said "The torpedo went straight into the engine room' I interrupted them and said ' How is it that so many of you have escaped for I can remember you told me that in these circumstances we would have no chance whatsoever ?"

One of them answered "It is a curious thing, but it was the first time in the career of the ship that we carried oil and not gasoline It took the Japs more than two hours to pump sufficient torpedoes into the ship to make her sink All of us went into the lifeboats We only had three lifeboats in working order, for one had been smashed"

"Kristiansen, our wireless operator, sent out an S O S signal as soon as the ship was hit and repeated it until he got an answer The enemy shelled the wireless cabin and put the transmitter out of action But by that time Kristiansen had done his job His efforts were not in vain He managed to leave the ship and when a plane came over

later in answer to his own S O S , they saw him lying on a door The plane dropped a rubber boat for him They saw him swim towards the rubber boat, but he was too exhausted to reach it so he swam back again to the door Unfortunately when a ship came round to pick up the survivors the following day he was nowhere to be found No man could have done his duty better"

A young engineer told me how, as they hung around the submarine in the lifeboats, covered all the time by a machine-gun, the Captain was ordered to go on board the submarine The crew of the Captain's lifeboat started rowing towards the submarine, so that the Captain could step on board with the dignity due to his position, but the Japs ordered them to stay clear, possibly for fear the crew might rush the submarine The Captain had to swim for it, and when he reached the side of the submarine, the Japs lowered a long pole with a large fish-hook on the end of it He was meant to grasp this and be hauled on board, but the Japs saw an opportunity for sadistic enjoyment and tried to hook the Captain After several attempts, during which the hook must have pierced his ribs, they succeeded in placing the hook under the Captain's arm and then hauled him up the side of the submarine They did not haul him right on board, but left him hanging half-way

In the meantime the other two lifeboats had succeeded in rowing pretty far away from the submarine But the Captain's boat was still near the submarine and the Japs then proceeded to machine-gun the boat

The young engineer went on to tell me that he was the only survivor from the Captain's lifeboat Soon after the machine-gunning he remembered hearing a terrible shriek coming from inside the submarine It was the shriek of a man in awful agony and the engineer felt sure it was the Captain being tortured for refusing to divulge information

Physical strength and moral courage seem to go hand in hand in Norwegian sailors This Captain was more than six feet tall, very broadly built with a boyish face and a blue eyed smile, but his whole expression could change into one of the firmest determination whenever his duty demanded serious thought or action

The young engineer, who told me the story about the Captain, was a typical young Norwegian He was fair, tall and clean limbed and looked you straight in the eye I remembered how he always brought his life jacket with him and placed it carefully beside him All his papers were sewn into his belt You could tell from his well groomed appearance that he was a boy of ambition and would be thorough in his work In his spare time he always seemed to be doing something of value He would read a good book or play classical music on his gramophone or sun-bathe for his health

This boy interested me and I talked to him to try and find out what he wanted out of life He told me he wanted to become an air pilot and in his spare time before the war he had studied and experimented with glider flying He said that the greatest hour in his life was when as a boy he was flown over Oslo in a plane

He went on "I took a job in this ship before the war so that I could see some of the world before I started on my real interest in life Then the invasion caught me and here I am wasting my time I would have been bombing Germany long ago"

I was not surprised when I heard about his clever escape from the Japanese As soon as the Captain had been hauled halfway up the submarine he realised that the Japs intended to shoot them all so he jumped out of the lifeboat, swam right under it and continued swimming until he came up on the far side of the submarine, where he hung on to the side of the submarine From here he watched the Japs turn and machine gun his friends on the lifeboats and he heard the gunner making sure that the man standing beside him was ready with his camera before he fired

All in the lifeboat were killed outright, except a little fox-terrier which had been a pet on board the tanker When the Japanese had completed their filthy task the boy dropped off from the side of the submarine and escaped unseen He then swam back to the lifeboat containing all his dead friends Strangely enough it was still floating for though it was full of holes, none of the air tanks had been punctured He and the dog were picked up a day later

I asked them where the first officer was and I could tell by the expression on every one's face that he too had died My thoughts went back to the Captain's cosy cabin where we used to sit and talk He and I had once discussed the best way to die if a convoy were attacked I had said that I would hate to be left lying on a raft in the sun perhaps to die of thirst Being wounded, too would make it worse He had replied that if you were wounded it was better to remain in the water because you did not see or feel the bleeding You just faded away It was strange that he should have said that, for one of the boys told me that he wanted to pull him out of the water into the lifeboat but the first officer had just said 'Never mind I am wounded and I think I am finished.' He just stayed in the water and had the death which he had planned

The charming old first engineer was found lying dead on a raft. One boy had heard him call for help The Japs answered him with machine-gun bullets He was still clutching an attache case containing all his important papers and a present for his wife I wonder if he ever got to know of the death of his only son who had been torpedoed in another ship The Captain I knew had hesitated to tell him about it His wife at home in Norway had lost a husband and a son in less than a month

So there we sat, all the boys telling me every one else's story They very seldom told me their own story for I think they were too reticent to do that

I was so absorbed by what they were telling that I did not notice there was another sailor sitting next to me who did not belong to the same boat He seemed a bit drunk by this time and in a rather excited state

Suddenly he turned to me and asked Why do you listen to those boys? I replied I am very interested because I sailed in their ship' Interested he flung at me The story they are telling you now is as old as the sea itself

"Over there," he said pointing to a sailor is a sailor who has been torpedoed five times and tomorrow he sails again He does not talk about it Here is another sailor who was on board one of the last ships to leave during the evacuation of Crete

"For myself," he went on, "I feel rather ashamed somehow the torpedoes always seem to miss my ship inches That has happened on at least six occasions I ha come to the conclusion that I am too bad a subject to d Even the torpedoes change their mind when I am on boa

"I drink hard," he said," and I can see by your expre sion that you blame me for it"

I hastened to contradict him "On the contrary," I sa "I do not blame you, so long as drinking does not interfe with your duty or upset the lives of those who are ne and dear to you I think that all of you here and othe like you, by the courage and devotion which you bring t bear in your perilous sailing of the sea, have earned th right to drink as much as you like, for who knows, tomorro you may die"

FINIS